

CLERAMBAULT

PUBLISHED BY  
JACKSON, WYLIE & CO., GLASGOW  
Publishers to the University

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LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, LTD.  
*Cambridge* . . . *Bowes and Bowes*  
*Oxford* . . . *B. H. Blackwell Ltd.*  
*Edinburgh* . . . *Douglas and Foulis*  
*New York* . . . *The Macmillan Co.*  
*Toronto* . . . *The Macmillan Co. of Canada*  
*Sydney* . . . *Angus and Robertson*

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MCMXXXIII

# CLERAMBAULT

or

ONE AGAINST ALL

*The History of a Free Conscience  
during the War*

BY

ROMAIN ROLLAND

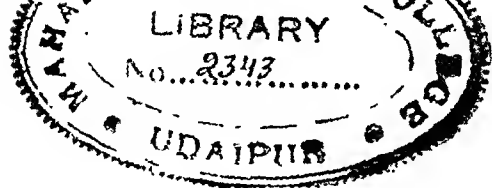
*Translated from the French*

PUBLISHED FOR THE TRANSLATOR BY  
JACKSON, WYLIE & CO.

PUBLISHERS TO THE UNIVERSITY  
GLASGOW

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.  
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW





## INTRODUCTION

THE subject of this book is not the war, although the war covers it with its shadow. The theme of the book is the engulfment of the individual soul in the abyss of the multitude soul. That is, in my opinion, an event much more pregnant with consequences for the future of the human race than the temporary supremacy of a nation.

I leave deliberately in the background, political questions. It is necessary to reserve them for special studies. But whatever causes may be assigned as to the origins of the war, whatever may be the thesis and reasons which support it, no reason in the world excuses the abdication of the individual judgment before public opinion.

The universal development of democracies, vitiated by a fossil survival—the monstrous “reason of State”—has led the minds of Europe to this article of faith, that man has no higher ideal than to make himself the servant of the community. And this community has been defined as—the State.

I make bold to say, that he who makes himself the blind servant of a community which is blind—or blinded—as are all States of to-day, when a few men,

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who are generally incapable of grasping the complexity of the peoples, do not know better than to impose on them, by the lies of the Press, and the implacable mechanism of the centralised State, thoughts and acts in keeping with their own caprices, their passions and their interests—such an one does not really serve the community, he enslaves and debases it, along with himself. He who wishes to be useful to others must first of all be free. Even love itself has no value, if it be that of a slave.

Free souls, firm characters, these are what the world has most need of to-day. By all the different routes—the corpse-like submission of the churches, the stifling intolerance of the “countries,” the stultifying unitarism of the socialisms—we return to the life of the herd. Man has slowly emerged from the warm mud of the earth. It seems that his age-old effort has exhausted him ; he allows himself to fall back into the slime. The collective soul lays hold of him ; he is swallowed by the sickening breath of the abyss. Now then, rouse yourselves you who do not believe that the cycle of man is completed. Dare to draw yourself out from the herd which drags you along ! Every man who is a real man ought to learn to stand alone in the midst of all, to think alone for all, and, if need be, against all. To think sincerely, even if it is *against* all, is still to think *for* all. Humanity requires that those who love it should face it up, and revolt against it, when

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occasion demands. It is not in twisting your conscience and your intelligence in order to give way to humanity, that you will serve humanity. It is in defending their integrity against its misuses of power. For they are some of its voices. And you betray humanity, if you betray yourselves.

R. R.

SIERRE,

*March, 1917.*

## PART ONE

AGENOR CLERAMBAULT, seated in the arbour of his garden of Saint-Prix, was reading to his wife and his children the Ode which he had just written to Peace, sovereign of men and of things ; *Ara Pacis Augustae*. He wished to celebrate therein the approaching arrival of universal fraternity.

It was an evening in July. On the summit of the trees shone a last rosy ray. Across the luminous damp vapour thrown like a thin veil on the slope of the hills, on the grey plain and on the distant city, the windows of Montmartre flashed with sparks of gold. Dinner had just been finished. Clerambault, leaning on the uncleared table, was looking as he was speaking from one to another of his three auditors, his look full of a naïve joy. He was sure to find there the reflection of his own contentment.

His wife Pauline had difficulty in following the flight of his ideas ; all reading in a loud voice caused her to fall after the third phrase into a condition of somnolence where the cares of the household took a ridiculous place ; one might have said that the voice of the reader caused them to sing like

canaries in a cage. In vain she strained herself to follow the lips of Clerambault, and to imitate with her lips the words of which she did not understand the meaning. Her eyes mechanically observed a hole in the table-cloth, her hands collected the crumbs on the table, her brain persisted in occupying itself with a refractory addition up to the moment when the look of Clerambault seemed to reproach her. Then she hastened to recall the last words she had heard, she went into an ecstasy in stammering out a scrap of poetry (she had never been able to quote one line exactly).

"How did you say that, Agenor? Repeat that phrase. . . . Dieu ! how pretty that is."

His daughter, little Rose, frowned. Maxime, the big boy, grinned ironically and said impatiently : "Mamma, do not always interrupt !"

But Clerambault smiled and patted affectionately the hand of his good wife. He had married for love when he was very young, poor and unknown : they had borne together the years of hardship. She was not quite of his intellectual level, and the difference did not become less with age : but Clerambault loved and respected his old companion. She exerted herself a good deal, with little success, to march at the same pace as her great man, of whom she was proud. He had an extraordinary indulgence for her. The critical spirit was not his forte; and he found himself the better for it in life, in spite

of innumerable errors in his judgments. As these errors were always to the advantage of others whom he saw favourably, they felt thankful to him for them, albeit rather ironically. He did not disturb them in their race for success ; his provincial candour was for the blasés, a refreshing spectacle, like a bush from the fields in a square.

Maxime made fun of his father, but he knew his worth. This fine boy of 19, with lively and laughing eyes, had been quick to acquire in the atmosphere of Paris that gift of quick and clear mocking observation, which applies itself more to the exteriors of objects and of beings than to ideas. He let nothing of a comical nature slip, even when it concerned those whom he loved. But that was without any malicious thought, and Clerambault smiled at his youthful impertinence. It did not diminish the admiration of Maxime for his father. It was the condiment of it ; these gamins of Paris, if they are to love the good God, must pull his beard !

As to Rosine, she kept quiet, according to her custom ; and it was not easy to know what she thought. She listened, with her body bent, her hands crossed, and her arms leaning on the table. There are natures which seem made to receive, like a silent earth which opens itself to all seeds. Many penetrate which remain asleep, and one does not know those which will fructify. The soul of the young girl was like this : the words of the reader were not

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reflected as they were on the intelligent and mobile features of Maxime ; but a light flush suffused itself under the skin and the moisture of the eyeballs which the eyelids hid witnessed to a passion and an interior trouble, as on those pictures of the Florentine Virgin when the Archangel announces to her that she will be the mother of God.

Clerambault did not deceive himself. As he looked round his little battalion, he dwelt with a special joy on the leaning blonde head whose owner knew she was being observed.

And the four formed on this evening of July a fire-side of affection and tranquil happiness of which the centre was the father, the idol of the family.

HE knew that he was the idol, and what is rare, the knowledge did not spoil him. He had so much pleasure in loving, so much affection to expend on all, near or far, that he found it natural that he should be loved in return. He was a grown up child, having attained fame after a life of mediocrity by no means gilded ; he had not suffered from the one, but he enjoyed the other. He had turned fifty and had not noticed it ; if he had several white threads in his large, blond Gaulish moustache, his heart was still of the same age as that of his children. Instead of following the tide of his generation, he went out to meet each new wave ; the best of life seemed to him to lie in the enthusiasm of youth perpetually renewed ; and he did not worry about the contradiction into which this youth perpetually in reaction with that which had preceded it might lead him ; these contradictions were grounded in his mind more enthusiastic than logical, inebriated by the beauty which he saw everywhere diffused. He joined to it a kindliness which did not harmonise very well with that aesthetic pantheism, but which he drew from his own nature.

He had made himself the interpreter of all noble



and humane ideas, and sympathised with the advanced parties, the workers, the oppressed, the people—whom he hardly knew ; for he was a pure bourgeois, with ideas generous and vague. Still more than the people he adored the multitude, he loved to bathe himself in it ; he loved to dissolve himself (he thought so at any rate) in the soul of all. That was an infatuation à la mode at that time among the intellectuals, and la mode, as usual, simply underlined with a bold line, a general disposition at the present time. Society was proceeding towards the ideal of the anthill. The most sensitive insects—the artists and the intellectuals—had been the first to show symptoms of it. That was just thought to be a pose, and the general condition of which the symptoms were the indication was not perceived.

The democratic evolution of the world for forty years had much less succeeded in establishing in politics the government of the people than it had in society the reign of mediocrity. The élite of the artists had at first justly reacted against this levelling of the intellects ; but, too feeble to struggle, they went into retirement, exaggerating their disdain and their exclusiveness. They preached a rarefied art, accessible only to a few initiated ones. Nothing better than seclusion when it is accompanied by richness of conscience, abundance of heart, an exuberant soul. But it was a far step from the literary groups of

the end of the nineteenth century to the fruitful retreats in which robust thoughts are moulded.

They were more preoccupied in economising their little intellectual competency than in renovating it. In order to purify it, they had withdrawn it from circulation. The result of this was that very soon it was no longer in currency. The life of the community passed by, without caring for it. The caste of artists withered away in make-believe refinement. Violent gusts of wind at the time of the storm of the Dreyfus affair shook some minds out of their torpor. Coming out of their orchid greenhouse, the gusts outside made them tipsy. They showed the same exaggeration in plunging into the great current which was passing as their predecessors had done in withdrawing from it. They believed that salvation was in the people, that the people was all that was good, all that was noble ; and in spite of the repulses that they experienced in their efforts to draw near to the people, they inaugurated a current in the thought of Europe. They prided themselves on being the interpreters of the collective soul. But it was not they who had conquered it ; they were the conquered ; the collective soul had made a breach in their ivory castle ; the enfeebled personalities of these thinkers surrendered themselves ; and to conceal from themselves their abdication, they said it was intended. In their need of convincing themselves, philosophers

and aesthetics invented theories which proved that the law was to abandon oneself to the tide of la Vie Unanime, instead of directing it, or, more modestly, to jog quietly along. One prided oneself in not being any more oneself, in not being any more a free agent. (Liberty was an out-of-date affair, in these democracies.) One gloried in being one of the globules of blood which are carried away by the stream, which was, according to some, the stream of the race ; according to others, that of the universal life. These fine theories from which the clever knew how to extract the receipts of art and of thought, were in full bloom in 1914.

They had delighted the heart of the naïve Clerambault. Nothing accorded better with his affectionate heart and uncertainty of mind. He who does not own himself can easily give himself away to others, to the universe, to this providential Force, unknown, indefinable, upon which one places the responsibility of thinking and of wishing. The great current passed ; and these lazy souls, rather than continue on their way on the bank, found it more simple and much more fascinating to allow themselves to be carried along. . . . Whither ? . . . No one troubled to think. Well-sheltered in their Occident, it never occurred to them that their civilisation could lose its acquired advantages ; the march of progress appeared as inevitable to them as the rotation of the earth ; this conviction per-

And when, in addition, one is part of the being admired, when one is of the same blood, one no longer distinguishes very well up to what point one comes from him, or if it is he who comes from you. The two children and the wife of Agenor Clerambault contemplated their great man with the tender and satisfied eyes of proprietorship, and he who ruled them by his ardent speech and high stature let things alone ; he knew well that it is the property which possesses the proprietor.

CLERAMBAULT had just finished by a Schilleresque vision of the fraternal joy promised in the future. Maxime, bounding with enthusiasm in spite of his irony, had himself raised a cheer in the speaker's honour. Pauline was audibly concerned as to whether Agénor had not overheated himself with speaking. And Rosine, the silent one, in the general excitement, placed furtively her lips on the hand of her father.

The maid brought in the mail and the evening papers. No one was eager to read them. Just after this conception of the shining future, the news of the day was out of date. Maxime, however, broke the band of the big bourgeois journal, glanced over the four formal pages, quickly turned to the stop press, and said : " Listen, it is war ! "

No one paid any attention to him. Clerambault lulled himself with the last vibrations of his vanished words. Rosine was in a tranquil ecstasy. The mother alone, whose mind, incapable of fixing itself on anything, fluttered about in all directions like a fly, catching by chance a scrap, heard the last word and exclaimed :

" Maxime, don't talk stupidities ! "

Maxime protested, showing in his paper the declaration of war by Austria against Serbia.

"Against whom?"

"Against Serbia."

"Oh well!" said the good woman, as much as to say: "What happens in the moon!"

But Maxime, insisting—*doctus cum libro*—proved that, from one thing to another, this far-away disturbance might put the spark to the powder. Clerambault, who began to emerge from his pleasant torpor, smiled tranquilly, and said that nothing would come of it.

"A piece of bluff, of which we have had so much for thirty years; each year, in the Spring or in the Summer . . . Bullies who rattled the sword . . . They did not believe in war; nobody wished it . . . War was impossible; it had been demonstrated. It was a scare of which it was necessary to purge the brain of free democracies . . ."

He developed this theme . . .

The night was serene, and sweet. The crickets in the fields. A glow-worm in the grass. The noise of a far-away train. The glycine perfumed the air. A fountain played. In the moonless sky the luminous furrow of the Eiffel Tower was turning.

The two women went back into the house. Maxime, tired of sitting, was running at the foot of the garden, with his young dog. Through the open windows one heard Rosine at the piano, playing,

with timid feeling, a page of Schumann. Clerambault, left alone, was stretched out in his cane arm-chair, with a thankful heart breathing the goodness of that summer night—happy to be alive and be a man.

Six days after.

Clerambault had spent the afternoon in the woods. He was like the legendary monk. Reclining at the foot of an oak, listening with open mouth to the singing of a bird, he could have let a century slip by like a day. He only decided to return when night fell. In the hall, Maxime, a little pale and laughing, came to him and said :

“ Ah well ! father, it is really so ! ”

He told him the news : the Russian mobilisation, the state of war in Germany. Clerambault looked at him, without understanding. His thoughts were so far from these gloomy follies. He tried to argue. The news was precise. They sat down at table. Clerambault hardly ate.

He sought for reasons to deny the consequences of these two crimes ; the good sense of public opinion, the wisdom of governments, the repeated assurances of socialist parties, the firm words of Jaurès. Mazime let him speak, his attention was elsewhere ; like his dog his ear was strained to the humming sounds of the night . . . A night so pure, so tender . . . Those who lived during those last evenings of July, 1914, and that more beautiful still, the first day



of August, keep in their memory the marvellous splendour of nature encircling with her affectionate arms, with a beautiful smile of pity, the abject human race, ready to devour itself.

It was nearly ten o'clock. Clerambault had ceased speaking. Nobody replied to him. They remained silent, heavy hearted, vaguely absorbed, or trying to be, the women with some needlework, and Clerambault with a book, which his eyes alone read. Maxime had gone out to the porch, and was smoking. Leaning on the balustrade he was looking at the sleeping garden and the magic coulée by the light of the moon in the shadow of the garden walk.

The ringing of the telephone made them start. Somebody was asking for Clerambault. He went with a heavy step, and a sleepy and dazed expression. He did not understand at first.

"Who is speaking? . . . Ah, it is you, dear friend? . . ."

(A Parisian confrère was telephoning him from the office of a newspaper.)

Still he could not understand.

"I do not grasp your meaning . . . Jaurès . . . Well! Jaurès . . . Ah! My God! . . ."

Maxime, impelled by a secret apprehension, followed the conversation at a distance; he rushed to take from his father's hands the receiver, which Clerambault let fall with a gesture of despair.

"Hullo! . . . Hullo! . . . What did you say?"

Jaurès assassinated ! ” . . . Exclamations of grief and of anger crossed one another on the wire. Maxime listened to the details, which he repeated to his relatives with a broken voice. Rosine had led Clerambault back near the table. He sat down, crushed. The shadow of an immense misfortune, like the ancient Destiny, hung over the house. It was not only the friend whose disappearance wrung the heart—the good, the joyous face, the cordial hand, the voice which scattered the clouds . . . It was the last hope of the threatened peoples, the only man who was able (they believed so at anyrate, with a confidence childlike and touching) to charm the gathered storm. With him fallen, like Atlas, the heavens fell.

Maxime ran to the station. He was going to learn the news in Paris, and promised to return by night. Clerambault remained in the isolated house, from which one could see in the distance the great phosphorescence of the town. He had not moved from the chair into which, in a state of stupor, he had let himself fall. The catastrophe was on its way ; this time he no longer doubted it ; already it had begun. Madame Clerambault tried to make him go to bed, but he would not hear of it. His thought was in ruins ; he could distinguish nothing solid and constant in it, could arrange nothing, and could not follow an idea. His interior house had crashed ; in the dust which rose from the

rubbish it was impossible to see what remained intact. It seemed that nothing remained. A heap of sufferings. Clerambault contemplated them with a dull eye, without perceiving the tears which flowed.

Maxime did not return. He had been gripped by the excitement of Paris. Towards one o'clock, Madame Clerambault, who had gone to bed, came to fetch her husband, and succeeded in leading him to their common room. He went to bed also, but when Pauline was asleep (as for her, anxiety made her sleep) he rose and returned to the room next door. He felt suffocated, he groaned ; his suffering was so compact and so dense that he could not find space to breathe. With the prophetic hypersensitiveness of the artist who often lives in the next day with greater intensity than in the present, he grasped all that was going to happen with a look of terror, and a crucified heart. This inevitable war between the greatest peoples of the world appeared to him as the bankruptcy of civilisation, the ruin of the most sacred hopes in human fraternity. He was penetrated with horror by the vision of this mad humanity which was sacrificing its most precious treasures, its forces, its genius, its highest virtues, to the bestial idol of war. A moral agony, a lacerated communion with the millions of unfortunates. To what end, to what end, the efforts of the centuries ? The void cramped his heart. He felt that he could not live longer, if this faith in the reason of men and

their mutual love were destroyed, if he had to admit that his creed of life and of art was an error, that the solution of the riddle of the world was black pessimism. And he was too cowardly to look it in the face ; he turned his eyes from it in fright. But the monster was there, and blew in his face. And Clerambault prayed (he did not know to whom or what) that *that* might not be, that *that* might not be ! Anything rather than such a thing as that. But the devouring truth stood behind the door, which was opening. All the night long Clerambault struggled to shut the door. . . .

At last towards morning, there began to dawn an animal instinct, come from no one knows whence, which caused his despair to deviate towards his dull need to find a cause precise and confined, to objectivize the evil in one man, or in a group of men, and to discharge angrily on them the misery of the universe. . . . It was only a fleeting apparition—the first far-away manifestations of a foreign soul, obscure, enormous, imperious, ready to break in—of the multitude soul . . .

It took form with the arrival of Maxime, who brought in the grease of it, which had been gathered all night in the streets of Paris. All the folds of his clothes, all the hairs on his body were impregnated with it. Tired, exalted, he would not sit down, his only thought was to go out again. The decree of mobilisation would appear to-day. War was cer-

tain. It was necessary. It was beneficent. It was necessary to finish it. The future of humanity was at stake. The liberties of the world were menaced. *They* had allowed the murder of Jaurès to scatter divisions and raise trouble in the attacked country. But the entire nation rose up in close array, standing up around its chiefs. The sublime days of the great Revolution were going to be born again. . . . Clerambault did not debate these assertions ; haltingly he said :

“ You think so ? You are quite sure ? ”

But that was like a secret prayer, in order that Maxime might affirm, in order that Maxime might emphasise. The news he brought added to the disorder and completed it, but at the same time, they began to direct the frantic forces of the mind to a fixed point. The first bark of the dog which gathers the herd.

Clerambault had but one desire ; to rejoin the herd, to rub himself against the human beasts, his brothers, to feel like them, to act like them. Although he was exhausted by the previous night, he went, in spite of his wife, to take the train for Paris along with Maxime. They waited a long time at the station, then in the train. The lines were encumbered, and the carriages filled. In the general agitation, that of Clerambault found an appeasement. He questioned, he listened ; all fraternised. And all, without knowing too well what they

thought, felt that they thought the same ; the same riddle, the same ordeal threatened them ; but one was no longer alone to get through them or to succumb under them. That reassured a little ; they felt the ardour of one another. No more distinction of classes ; neither workmen nor bourgeois ; one did not look at the clothes, nor at the hands ; one looked at the eyes where palpitated the same light of life, which quivered under the same approach of death. And all these poor people were so visibly strangers to the causes of the catastrophe, to this suspended fatality, that the feeling of their innocence led them all childishly to seek the guilty ones elsewhere. That also was consoling and calming for the conscience.

When Clerambault arrived at Paris, he breathed more freely ; to his agony of the past night had succeeded a melancholy stoic and virile.

He was only at the first stage of his journey.

THE decree of general mobilisation had just been posted up at the doors of the Mairies. The people silently read, re-read and went away, without exchanging a word. After the anxious waiting of the preceding days—(the crowd around the newspaper stalls, the people seated on the pavement, watching for the hour for the news, and when the papers arrived, gathering into groups to read them)—this was the certainty ! It was the pulling of the trigger of a gun. The obscure calamity which one feels is coming, without knowing at what time, or from where, causes fever. But once it is there, one breathes, one looks it in the face, and one turns up one's sleeves. There were several hours of powerful meditation. Paris was taking its breath and preparing its fists. Then that which swelled the souls diffused itself outside. The houses emptied themselves, and in the streets ran a human river of which all the drops sought one another in order to coalesce.

Clerambault fell in the middle, and was absorbed all at once. Going out of the station, scarcely had he put his foot on the pavement. Without words, without gestures, without incidents. The serene exaltation of the flood ran in him. This grand people

were still pure of violence. It knew itself (it believed itself) innocent, and these millions of hearts, in this first hour when the war was virgin, burned with an enthusiasm serious and sacred. Into that calm and proud intoxication there entered a feeling of the injustice which was being done to it, a just pride in its strength, of the sacrifices which it was going to consent to, pity for itself, pity for others who had become part of itself, its brothers, its children, its loved ones. All were pressed together flesh to flesh, drawn closely together by the superhuman embrace—the consciousness of the gigantic body formed by their union. Above their heads, an apparition—the phantom which incarnated this union—Their Country. Half-beast, half-god, like the Sphinx of Egypt or the Assyrian bull; but men saw only its shining eyes; its feet remained hidden. She was the divine monster in which each of the living finds himself multiplied—the devouring Immortality, in which those who are going to die choose to believe that they will remain alive, more than alive, and crowned with glory. Her invisible presence flowed in the air like wine. And each one carried to his vintage tub, his basket, his bunch—his ideas, his passions, his self-devotion, his interests. There were many disgusting insects in the grapes, many particles of dust in the wooden shoes which pressed them, but the wine was ruby like and set the heart aflame—Clerambault drank it greedily.



He was not, however, really changed by it. His soul was not changed. It was only forgotten. As soon as he was alone again, he found it again moaning. Also his instinct caused him to avoid solitude. He obstinately refused to return to St. Prix, where the family was accustomed to pass the summer, and he reinstalled himself in his apartment in Paris on the fifth floor rue d'Assas. He did not wish even to wait eight days, not even to return home to assist in the removal. He needed the friendly heat which came from Paris, and which entered by his windows. Every occasion was good to him to plunge himself completely in it, to go into the street, to join the groups, to follow the demonstrations, to buy pell-mell all the newspapers, which, in ordinary times, he despised. He returned always more depersonalised, anaesthetized for that which was passing within him, broken off from his own conscience, a stranger in his house—a stranger to himself. That is why he felt more at home, outside than inside.

MADAME CLERAMBAULT had returned to Paris with her daughter. The first evening after their arrival, Clerambault took Rosine with him along the boulevards. There was not the solemn fervour of the first days. The war had begun. Truth was locked up. The great Liar, the Press, was emptying at random in the open mouths of the nations the alcohol of victories, and its poisoned stories. Paris was decorated as for a holiday. The houses from top to bottom were draped in the tricolour. In the working class streets every attic window had its little halfpenny flag like a flower in the hair.

At the corner of the faubourg Montmartre they encountered a strange procession. A tall old man with a white beard marched at the head with a banner. He advanced with long supple and ungainly steps as if he was going to jump or dance. The skirts of his frock coat fluttered in the wind. Behind followed a mass, compact, indistinct, shouting. Arm in arm, workmen and bourgeois, someone carrying a child on his shoulders ; a girl's red dishevelled hair between a chauffeur's cap and that of a soldier. Chests out, chins raised, and mouths open, shouting the Marscillaise. To the right and to

the left of the ranks a double row of patibulary faces stood at the edge of the pavements, ready to insult the passers-by who, heedless, did not salute the flag. Rosine, excited, saw her father, with bare head, singing and following the procession ; laughing and speaking in a high voice, he dragged along the young girl, without noticing the pressure of the clasped hand which tried to hold him back.

When Clerambault returned he remained talkative and excited. He spoke for hours. The two women listened patiently. Madame Clerambault did not understand, according to her custom, and repeated what had been said. Rosine understood all, and did not say a word. But she gave her father a look by stealth ; and her look was like freezing water.

Clerambault was becoming exalted. He was not yet at the bottom, but he applied himself conscientiously to be. There remained to him, however, enough clearness to make him scared sometimes, at his progress. The artist is more exposed, by his sensitiveness, to the waves of emotion which come to him from the outside ; but he has also, to resist them, weapons which others have not. Even the least thoughtful, he who abandons himself to his lyrical effusions, possesses in some degree a faculty of introspection which he has only to utilize. If he does not do so, it is rather because he does not wish to than that he is not able to ; he is afraid of seeing

himself too closely ; he would see an image which would not flatter him. But those who, like Clerambault, have in default of psychological gifts the virtue of sincerity, are sufficiently armed to exercise control over their exaltation.

One day he was walking alone ; he saw a crowd on the other side of the street. On the terrace of a café, the people were jostling one another. He crossed the road. He was calm. He found himself on the other pavement, in a confused jostling throng, which whirled round an invisible point. He had sufficient trouble to get in. Scarcely was he drawn into this mill-wheel when he became a part of the wheel ; he did exactly what it did ; his mind turned with it. He saw in the middle of the wheel a man who was struggling ; and before he knew the reason for the angry feelings of the crowd, he sensed them. He did not know if they were dealing with a spy or a rash speech-maker who had braved the popular passions ; but they were crying round about him, and he perceived that . . . yes that he, Clerambault, had just cried :

“ Hit him on the head.”

An eddy of the crowd threw him off the pavement, a carriage separated him from the crowd ; and when the road was clear again, the pack removed itself in running after its prey. Clerambault followed them with his eyes, and heard again the sound of his own voice. He turned round and

went back to his rooms. He was not proud of himself. . . .

After that day he went out less often. He distrusted himself. But he continued to cultivate the intoxication in his room. At his work table he believed himself in shelter. He did not know the virulence of the plague. The malady slipped in by the windows, by the slits in the doors, by the printed paper, by the air, by the thought. The more sensitive breathed it, before having seen anything, before having read anything, as soon as they entered the town. With others it was sufficient to have touched it once, in passing ; the infection then developed in isolation. Clerambault, although removed from the crowd, had been smitten ; and the malady showed itself by the usual premonitory symptoms. This tender and affectionate man hated, hated through love. His intelligence, which had always ✓ been profoundly loyal, tried in secret to cheat itself, to justify its instincts of hatred by reasons which were contrary to them. He taught himself passionate injustice and lying. He wished to persuade himself that he was able to accept the fact of the war, and to participate in it, without renouncing his pacifism of yesterday, his humanitarianism of the day before yesterday, and his constant optimism. That was not easy ; but there is nothing that the reason cannot attain to. When its proprietor feels the imperious need of getting rid for a time of principles which

## C L E R A M B A U L T

cramp him, reason finds in the principles themselves the exception which violates them, while confirming the rule. Clerambault commenced to concoct a thesis and an ideal—absurd in themselves—which reconciled contradictory things ; war against war, war for peace, for everlasting peace.

THE enthusiasm of his son was a great relief to him. Maxime had enlisted. A wave of heroic joy carried away his generation. It had waited such a long time—it did not dare to hope—for the occasion to act and to sacrifice itself !

The older men, who had not given themselves the trouble to understand it, were in a state of wonder. They remembered their own youth, mediocre and blotched, of mean egoism, of petty ambitions and low enjoyments. Not recognising themselves in their children, they attributed to the war the blossoming forth of those virtues which had been growing for twenty years around their indifference, and which the war was going to reap. Even with a father so large-minded as Clerambault, Maxime was wilting. Clerambault was too much occupied in pouring out his overflowing and diffuse personality to see properly and to assist the beings that he loved. He brought to them the warm shade of his thought but he took from them the sun.

These young people whose energies embarrassed them, sought vainly for the exercise of them ; they found nothing in the ideal of their more noble elders. The humanitarianism of a Clerambault was too vague ; it satisfied itself with agreeable

hopes without risks and without vigour, which alone permitted the quietude of a generation grown old in the loquacious peace of Parliaments and Academies. It did not seek to foresee, unless as oratorical themes, the dangers of the future ; still less did it dream of determining its attitude, in the day when the peril would materialise. Between the ideals of action and those most opposed, one had not the strength to make a choice. One was patriot and internationalist. One constructed, in his mind, Palaces of Peace and Super-dreadnoughts. One wished to understand all ; to embrace all, and to love all. This enfeebled Whitmanism might have, aesthetically, its value. But its practical incoherence did not offer to the young people any direction at the cross roads where they found themselves. They marked time on the spot where they were standing, trembling at the uncertain delay, and at the utility of their days which were passing. . . .

The war came to put an end to their indecision. They acclaimed it. It chose for them. They threw themselves in its train. To march to death maybe. But to march, is to live. The battalions went away singing, stamping with impatience, with dahlias in the military caps, their rifles decorated with flowers. The discharged soldiers rejoined, the young men enrolled, the mothers urged them on. One would have thought that it was a departure for the Olympic Games.



On the other side of the Rhine, the youth did the same. And there, as here, their gods escorted them ; Fatherland, Justice, Right, Liberty, Progress of the World, Eden-like dreams of regenerated humanity, all the phantasmagoria of mystic ideas in which the passions of young people envelop themselves. None of them doubted that their cause was the right one. Let others argue. They were the living proof. He who gives his life needs no other argument.

But the older men, who were remaining behind, had not their reasons for abstaining from reason. Their reason was given to them, in order that they might use it, not for the truth, but for victory. In the wars of to-day, which comprise entire peoples, thought is enlisted ; thought kills, as well as cannons ; it kills the soul ; it kills beyond the seas, it kills across the centuries ; it is the heavy artillery which works at a distance. Quite naturally, Clerambault pointed his guns. The question for him was not to see clearly, to see largely, to encompass the horizon, but to aim at the enemy. He had the illusion that he was assisting his son.

With an unconscious and feverish bad faith, which his affection preserved, he sought in all that he saw, heard or read, arguments to support his earnest wish to believe in the sacredness of the cause. Everything which could prove that the enemy alone had wished for war, that the enemy alone was the enemy of peace, and that to wage war against the enemy

was still to wish for peace. Proofs were not wanting. They are never wanting. To open or close the eyes at the right moment, can always be done. Still, however, Clerambault was not entirely satisfied. The secret uneasiness in which these half-truths, these truths with tails of lies, were putting his honest-man conscience, betrayed itself by an increasingly passionate irritation against the enemy. And parallel with this—(like two pails in a well : when one ascends, the other descends)—his patriotic enthusiasm became greater and drowned in a useful intoxication his last torments of mind.

Now he was waiting for the least considerable facts of the newspapers to support his thesis ; and although he knew what to think of the veracity of these newspapers, he never doubted it, when their assertions served his greedy and uneasy passion. He adopted, for the enemy, the principle that "*the worst is always certain.*" He was almost thankful to Germany for furnishing him, by its acts of cruelty and its repeated violations of the right, the solid confirmation of the sentence, which, for greater security, he had pronounced beforehand.

Germany gave him good measure. Never has there been a State at war which seemed in such a hurry to raise against it the universal conscience. This apoplectic nation, which was bursting with its strength, had hurled itself on the adversary, in a delirium of pride, anger and fear. The human

beast, unloosed, created, from the beginning, a circle of methodical horror round itself. All the brutalities of the instincts and of faith were skilfully aroused by those who held it in the leash, by his chief officials, his staff-officers, his regimented professors, his army chaplains. War has always been, and always will be, a crime. But Germany organised it, as she did everything else. She introduced into the code murder and incendiarism. Over that, a choleric mysticism, created by Bismarck, Nietzsche, and the Bible, poured its boiling oil. The Superman and Christ were mobilised to destroy the earth and to regenerate it. The regeneration began in Belgium. A thousand years from now it will still be spoken of. The horrified world witnessed the infernal spectacle of the old civilisation of Europe, more than two thousand years old, falling down under the barbarous and learned blows of the great nation which was its vangaurd—Germany, rich in intelligence, in science and in power—after a fortnight of war, docile and degraded. But that which the organisers of the German delirium did not foresee was that, like the cholera which armies carry with them, it would reach the other camp, and once installed in the enemy countries, it would not be dislodged before having affected all Europe, and having rendered it uninhabitable for centuries. In all the follies, in all the violences of this atrocious war, Germany showed the example. Her great

body, more plump, better nourished, offered to the epidemic greater scope ; it was terrible. But when the malady began to abate with her, it spread to the others, under the form of a slow and tenacious fever, which from week to week incrustated itself to the bone.

To the insanities of the German thinkers the spokesmen of Paris and elsewhere replied without delay. They were the Homeric heroes. But they did not fight. They only shouted the better.

They insulted not only the enemy, they insulted his father, his grandfathers, his entire line ; they went further, they denied his past. The meanest academician worked with rage to defame the glory of the great men asleep in the peace of the tomb.

Clerambault listened, listened, absorbed. . . . He was, however, one of the rare French poets who had, before the war, European relations and whose work had found admirers in Germany. 'Tis true, he did not speak any foreign language, like a good old spoiled child of France, who does not take the trouble to visit others, sure that others will come to him. However, he received them well, his mind was free from national prejudices, and the intuition of his heart filled the gaps in his education, and made him give his admiration without stint to foreign genius. But at present, when he was instructed that it was necessary to distrust all—(Keep quiet ! Be distrustful !)—that Kant led up to Krupp,

he no longer dared to admire without official guarantee. The modesty which caused him in times of peace respectfully to accept as Gospel truth that which was published by learned and esteemed men had assumed, in war time, the proportions of a fabulous credulity. He swallowed, without saying "ouf," the strange discoveries which were made by the intellectuals of his country, who dug up and trampled on the art, the science, the intelligence, the soul of the other country, right down through the centuries. This work of delirious bad faith, denied to the enemy people all genius, and found in its highest titles to glory the mark of its present infamy and stole those titles from it in attributing them to another race.

Clerambault was confounded by it, and indignant, also—(although he did not acknowledge it to himself)—at heart, he rejoiced.

To share his exaltation, and to support it with new arguments, he went to call on his friend Perrotin.

Hippolyte Perrotin was one of the type which has created the glory of French learning—and which is becoming rare nowadays—a great classical scholar. His vast and sagacious curiosity browsed, with a tranquil step, in the garden of the ages. Too much of an observer to lose anything in the spectacle of the present, which was nevertheless the least object of his attention, he knew how to reduce it nicely to scale in the ensemble of the picture. What was most serious in the view of others was not so in his view ; and the agitations of politics were to him like grubs on a rose bush. But being an herbalist and not a gardener, he did not feel himself bound to clean the rose bush. He confined himself to studying it, with its parasites ; that to him was a subject of constant delight. He had the keenest sense of the shades of literary beauty. His science, far from injuring it, brightened it, in offering to his thought an almost infinite field of experience pleasant to compare and to taste. He belonged to the great French tradition of those scientists who were master-writers, from Buffon to Renan and to

Gaston Paris. A member of the Academy and of two or three ranks, the extent of his learning secured for him among the pure men of letters, his colleagues, a superiority not only as regards a taste sure and classical, but as regards a mind free and open to what was new. He did not deem himself above learning, as the majority of them did, from the moment that they passed the threshold of the sacred Cupola ; old master though he was, he remained at school. Then when Clerambault was still unknown to the rest of the Immortals, except to two or three poet confrères, who did not speak of him (and that as little as possible) except with a disdainful smile, he had discovered him, and classed him in his herbal. He was arrested by several pictures ; the originality of certain verbal forms, the mechanism of the imagination, primitive and artlessly complicated, attracted him ; then the man interested him. Clerambault, to whom he addressed a word of congratulation, came to thank him, flowing over with gratitude ; and the ties of friendship between the two men were joined. They hardly resembled one another ; Clerambault with his lyrical gifts and a moderate intelligence, which the heart dominated. And Perrotin, furnished with a most lucid mind, which the transports of his imagination never troubled. But both had in common the dignity of life, intellectual probity, a disinterested love of art and of science, which found joy in itself and not in

success. That had not hindered Perrotin from making his way quite well, as we have seen. Positions and honours had come to him. He did not seek them ; but he did not reject them : he was careless of nothing.

Clerambault found him occupied with unswathing the successive bandages with which the perusal of centuries had concealed the original thought of a Chinese philosopher. At this occupation, which to him was customary, he naturally discovered the contrary meaning to the meaning apparent at first sight ; in passing from hand to hand the idol becomes black.

It was in this state of mind that Perrotin, absent-minded and very polite, received Clerambault. Even while listening to the conversation of the drawing room he was inwardly critical, his irony making fun of it at its expense.

Clerambault laid out before him his new acquisitions. He began, as from a fact established and definite, by the recognised unworthiness of the enemy nation ; and the whole question was to know if one should see in this the irremediable decadence of a great people, or the proof pure and simple of a barbarism which had always existed, but which veiled itself. Clerambault inclined towards the second explanation. Full of his recent readings, he made responsible for the violation of Belgian neutrality, and the crimes of the German armies,



Luther, Kant and Wagner. As is commonly said, there had not been a theologian nor metaphysician nor musician among them ; he spoke according to the faith of the Academicians. He made reservations only as regards Beethoven, who was Flemish, and Goethe, the last a citizen of a free town, and almost Strasburgian which is half French or French and a half. He sought for approval.

He was surprised not to find on the part of Perrotin an ardour corresponding to his. Perrotin smiled, listened and looked at Clerambault with a good-natured and attentive curiosity. He did not say no and he did not say yes. As regards some assertions, he made prudent reservations ; and when Clerambault, boiling with eagerness, opposed him with his texts, which were signed by two or three illustrious colleagues of Perrotin, the latter made a little gesture, as much as to say :

“ Ah, you tell me so ! ”

Clerambault became angry. Perrotin then changed his attitude, showing a lively interest in the “ judicious remarks ” of his “ excellent friend,” nodding his head to everything that he said, replying to his direct questions by vague words, or in making a courteous assent to them, as is done to someone who must not be contradicted.

Clerambault went away, put out of countenance and discontented.

He was reassured, as regards his friend, when,

several days after, he read the name of Perrotin in a violent protest by the Academies against the barbarians. He wrote to congratulate him. Perrotin thanked him in a few prudent and sibylline words:

“My dear Sir,”—(he preserved in his letters the ceremonious and stilted formulæ of a Monsieur of Port-Royal)—“I am always ready to obey the suggestions of my country ; they are orders for us. My conscience is at its service, as it is the duty of every good citizen. . . .”

ONE of the most curious effects of the war on the mind was that it revealed new affinities between individuals. People who up to that moment had not a thought in common discovered suddenly that they all thought the same. They gathered together, because they resembled one another. This was what was called "The Sacred Union." Men of all parties and all temperaments, choleric people, phlegmatic people, royalists, anarchists, clericals, infidels, forgot suddenly their everyday character, their passions, their manias, and their antipathies, allowing their skin to fall ; and one found oneself in presence of new beings, who grouped themselves in an unforeseen fashion, like iron filings round a hidden magnet. All the old categories had momentarily disappeared, and one was not astonished to be now closer to someone unknown yesterday than to friends of long standing. One would have said that underneath the earth souls communicated by secret rhizomes which extended a long distance, in the darkness of instinct. A region little known, where observation rarely ventures. Our psychology restricts itself to part of the ego which emerges from the soil ; it describes the individual shades of it with

minute detail ; but it does not observe that that is only the top of the plant ; the nine-tenths are hidden underground and connected by the roots to other plants. This region of the soul, deep (or low), lies dormant in ordinary times ; the mind sees nothing of it. War, in awakening this subterranean life, made one aware of moral relationships which were not suspected. A sudden intimacy revealed itself between Clerambault and a brother of his wife, a man whom he had, up to that time, every reason to regard as the type of perfect Philistine.

Leo Camus had not reached fifty years of age. He was tall, thin, a little bent ; he had a black beard, a sallow complexion, poor hair—(baldness began to show at the back, under the hat)—little wrinkles in every direction, crossing one another, and counter-acting one another, like a string badly made ; in appearance disagreeable, scowling, perpetually with a cold. He had been for thirty years employed by the State, and his career had been passed in the shadow of the court-yard of a government office ; in the course of years he had changed his part, but not the shadow ; he had advanced, but in the court-yard. No chance that he would get out of it in this life. At present he was assistant, which permitted him to cast a shadow in his turn. Almost no relations with the public ; he only communicated with the outside world across a rampart of files and piles of papers. He was an old bachelor and had no

friends. His misanthropy maintained that none existed on the earth otherwise than through interest. He had no affection except for the family of his sister. And he only showed that in finding fault with everything they did. He was one of those people whose restless uneasiness causes them to be angry with those whom they love when they see them suffering, and strive to prove that they suffer through their own fault. The Clerambaults did not trouble much about this. It did not displease even Madame Clerambault, herself a little soft, to be thus hustled about. As for the children, they knew that these rebuffs were accompanied by little gifts; they pocketed the presents and allowed the rest to pass.

With regard to his brother-in-law, the attitude of Leo Camus had, in the course of years, varied. When his sister had married Clerambault, Camus did not trouble to conceal his displeasure at the marriage. An unknown poet did not seem to him "serious." To be a poet (an unknown poet) was an excuse for not working! . . . Ah, when one is "known" it is another matter. Camus admired Hugo; and was even capable of reciting verses of the "Chatiments" or from Auguste Barbier. But they were "known." That was the gist of the matter. . . . Now the exact situation was, Clerambault had become "known." Camus read about him one day in his favourite paper.

From that day, Camus had consented to read the

poems of Clerambault. He did not understand them, but he did not blame them for that ; he liked to call himself " out of date "—it seemed to him that he thus established his superiority. There are many like him in the world, who are proud that they cannot understand. Is it not good that each one should pride himself, some in respect of what they have, and the others in respect of what they have not ? Camus agreed, moreover, that Clerambault could " write." (He was a member of the profession of letters.) He had for his brother-in-law respects growing with the eulogiums of the Press, and he liked to talk with him. From the beginning he had appreciated without saying so, his affectionate kindness ; and what pleased him also in this great poet (for now he called him so) was his manifest incapacity in business, his practical ignorance ; on this ground Camus was his master, and very well he made him see it. Clerambault had an innocent confidence in men. Nothing suited better the aggressive pessimism of Camus. That kept him in exercise. The greater part of his visits was devoted to reducing to fragments the illusions of Clerambault. But they were tenacious of life. He had to begin over again every time. Camus was irritated at this, but with a secret pleasure. He required an excuse continually renewed to find the world bad and men imbeciles. Above all, he spared no politician. This government employee hated all governments, although he

would have been puzzled to say what he would have put in their places.

The only political form that he understood was the opposition. From a constricted nature, he suffered from a fruitless life. He was the son of peasants and made to cultivate vines, like his father, or to exercise, as watchdog over the people of the fields, his instincts of authority. But the diseases of the vine had come, and the pride of being a quill-driver. The family had emigrated to the town. At present, he would not have been able to return to his true nature without degrading himself. If he had wished to do so he would have found that nature atrophied. And not finding his place in society, he accused society; he served it, like thousands of State officials, like a bad servant, like a hidden enemy.

A mind of this sort, chagrined, bitter, misanthropic, ought, it would seem, to have been unhinged by the war. It was quite the contrary. It made him calm. The grouping of the herd in arms against the stranger is a degradation for those rare free minds which embrace the universe, but it adds to the crowd of those who vegetate in the impotence of an anarchical egoism; it raises them to the higher rank of organised egoism. Camus awoke suddenly with the feeling for the first time, that he was no longer alone in the world.

The instinct of patriotism is unique, perhaps, in

respect that, under the conditions of the present time, it escapes being mutilated by daily life. All the other instincts, the natural aspirations, the legitimate need of loving and acting, are in society stifled, mutilated, obliged to pass under the yoke of denials and compromises. And when man, having arrived at middle life, turns back to look at them he sees them all marked on the forehead with his defeat and his cowardices ; then with a bitter mouth, he is ashamed of them and of himself. Alone the instinct of patriotism has remained aside, unused, but not soiled. And when it surges up it is inviolate ; the soul which embraces it carries with it the ardour of all its ambitions, its loves, and its desires, which life has betrayed. A half century of restricted life takes its revenge. The millions of little gaols of the social prison open. At last ! . . . The fettered-up instincts stretch their stiffened limbs, and have the right to jump up in the open air and to cry. The Right ? They have the duty at present of throwing themselves all together, like a falling mass. The isolated flakes made themselves into an avalanche.

The avalanche dragged Camus with it. The petty office-chief was one with it. And there was no frenzy, no vain violence. A great power and calmness. He was "well." Heart well, body well. He had no more attacks of insomnia. For the first time for many years his stomach did not make him suffer —because he had forgotten it. He even passed the



winter—(a thing which had never happened before)—without a day's cold. One no more heard him sourly finding fault with this and that ; he did not make long and violent speeches about what had been done and what had not been done ; he was invaded by a sacred piety for all the social body—this body which was his, stronger, more beautiful and better ; he felt himself fraternal with all those who constituted it by their close union, like a bunch of bees suspended from a branch. He envied the younger men who went away to defend it ; he contemplated with moist eyes his nephew Maxime, preparing himself gaily, and at the departure of the train which took away the young man, he kissed Clerambault, he shook hands with unknown parents who accompanied their sons ; he had tears of emotion and happiness in his eyes. In these hours Camus would have given all. It was his honeymoon with Life. The solitary soul, who has been separated from it, sees it pass suddenly and embraces it. . . . Life passes. The state of well-being of a Camus is not made to last. But he who has known it lives only through the memory of it, with the view to rekindling it.

War has given it to him. Peace then is an enemy. Enemies those who wish for peace.

CLERAMBAULT and Camus exchanged their thoughts. They exchanged them so well that Clerambault finished by not knowing what his thought had become. As he lost himself, he felt more imperiously the need of acting ; that was a way of affirming himself. . . . Of affirming himself? Alas! It was Camus that he affirmed. In spite of his conviction and his habitual ardour, he was only an echo—of what miserable voices !

He applied himself to writing dithyrambs of combat. It was a state of emulation among the poets who did not fight. There is no danger of their products encumbering the memory of the future. Nothing in their previous career had prepared these poor people for such a task. In vain they swelled the voices and appealed to the resources of Gallic rhetoric—the poilus merely shrugged their shoulders. But the people in the rear were much more pleased with them than with those stories, dark and sticky with mud, which came from the trenches. The vision of a Barbusse had not yet imposed on these loquacious shadows its truth. Clerambault had no difficulty in shining in this competition of eloquence. He had the fatal gift of verbal and rhythmic eloquence which separates poets from the

reality in enveloping them as in a cobweb. In times of peace, the inoffensive web hung from the bushes ; the wind passed through ; and the debonair spider did not dream of catching anything in its meshes but the light. To-day those poets cultivated in themselves carnivorous instincts, happily out of date ; and one perceived, crouching at the bottom of their web, an ugly beast whose eye watched for its prey. They sung of hate and holy butchery. Clerambault performed like them, better than them, because his voice was fuller. By dint of crying out, this worthy man finished by experiencing passions that he did not possess. " To know " hatred at last (to " know " in the biblical sense) he felt secretly that low pride of a collegian who comes out of a brothel for the first time. Now he was a man ! As a matter of fact he lacked nothing now to make him resemble the others in baseness.

Camus had the first fruits of each of his poems. That was his due. He neighed with enthusiasm, for he recognised himself in them. And Clerambault was flattered, because he sought to reach the popular taste. The two brothers-in-law passed the evenings tête-à-tête. Clerambault read ; Camus drank in his lines ; he knew them by heart ; he repeated to whoever was prepared to listen that Hugo had come to life again, and that each of these poems was worth a victory. His noisy admiration happily dispensed with the necessity of the other members of the

family giving a judgment. Rosine regularly contrived, under some pretext, to leave the room at the end of the reading. The pride of Clerambault noticed it ; and he would have liked to have the opinion of his daughter ; but he found it more prudent not to ask it. He preferred to persuade himself that the flight of Rosine was due to her emotion and her timidity. At the same time he was vexed. But the approbation from the outside made him forget this little wound. The poems had appeared in the bourgeois papers ; they secured for Clerambault the most brilliant success of his career. No other of his works had raised this unanimous enthusiasm. A poet is always glad to hear it said that his last work is the best ; and he is still more so when he knows it is the least good. Clerambault knew it perfectly well. Therefore he tasted with a childish vanity the sycophancies of the Press. In the evening he caused them to be read aloud by Camus in the circle of his family. He beamed on hearing them ; and when they were finished he almost said : “ Encore ! ”

The only somewhat false note in this concert of praises came from Perrotin. (Decidedly he had been deceived as regards the latter ! He was not a true friend. . . .) Without doubt the old scientist, to whom Clerambault had sent the collection of his poems, had congratulated him politely regarding them ; he praised his great talent, but he did not

say that this book was his best work ; he even advised him, after having offered his tribute to the war-like muse, to write now " a work of pure fancy, detached from the present." What did he wish to insinuate ? Is it becoming, when an artist comes to submit a work for your admiration, to say to him, " I would like to read another one which does not resemble this one in any way " ? Clerambault saw there a new indication of the grievous lukewarmness to patriotism which he had already discovered on the part of Perrotin. This want of understanding succeeded in making him feel quite cold towards his old friend. He thought that war was the great test of character, that it revised values and sorted out friendships. And he did not at all think that the loss of Perrotin was hardly compensated for by the acquisition of Camus and so many new friends, assuredly more modest, but at heart simple and warm. . . .

Still, however, during the night he had minutes of oppression ; he awoke uneasy ; he was discontented and ashamed. . . . About what ? Was he not doing his duty ?

THE first letters of Maxime were a comfort, a cordial of which one drop dissipated discouragement. One lived on them in the long intervals which separated the news. In spite of the anguish of these silences, in which each second might be fatal to the being loved, his confidence (which perhaps he exaggerated, on account of his affection for his own people, or through superstition) communicated itself to all. His letters overflowed with youth, with exuberant joy, which touched its summit in the days which followed the victory of the Marne. The whole family was stretched out towards him. The family was a single body, a plant of which the top is bathed in light, and which ascends towards the light, trembling with mystic adoration.

The extraordinary light in which souls blossomed, souls which only yesterday were delicate and torpid, and which destiny threw into the infernal circle of the war. Light of death, sport with death! Maxime, this great spoiled boy, delicate, squeamish, who in ordinary times took care of himself like a little lady, found an unexpected relish in the privations and in the trials of his life. Astonished at himself, he made a parade of it in his letters in a

gracefully boasting manner, which delighted the hearts of his parents. Neither the one nor the other was Cornelian, and the thought of sacrificing their child to a barbarous idea would have filled them with horror. But the transfiguration of their dear little one, who was suddenly transformed into a hero, gave rise to a fullness of tenderness which they had never before experienced. The enthusiasm of Maxime communicated to them, in spite of their disquiet, an intoxication. It made them feel ungrateful, for their life of not long ago, the good, peaceable, affectionate life of the long monotonous days. Maxime expressed for it an amusing disdain. It seemed to him to be ridiculous, after one had seen what was taking place "down there" . . . "Down there" one was content to sleep three hours per night, on the ground, or on a bed of straw, at the Greek Kalends ; content to pack off, at three o'clock in the morning, to warm oneself with 30 kilometres of marching, with the pack on the back, and to take a bath of perspiration which lasted from eight to ten hours—content, above everything else content to encounter the enemy, in order to breathe a little, lying down behind a parapet, shooting at the Bosches. . . . This little Cyrano said that a battle was a respite from marching. When he described an engagement one would have thought he was at a concert or at the cinema. The rhythm of the shells, the noise when they were

fired, and that when they exploded, reminded him of the beating of the kettledrums in the divine scherzo of the Ninth Symphony. As soon as the mosquitoes of steel, frolicsome, imperious, ragged, cunning, perfidious, or simply animated by an easy unconstraint, caused their aerial musical box to sound above their heads, he had the feeling of a gamin of Paris who runs out of the house to see a splendid fire. No more fatigue! The mind and body alert. And when the expected "Charge" came, one raised oneself with a bound, light as a feather, and, under the shower, one fled to the nearest shelter, with the joy of discovery, like the dog which scents the game. One went on all fours, or crawled on the belly, one ran doubled up, performed Swedish exercises across the underwood. . . . That made one forget that they could not march any longer; and when the night fell, one said to oneself Well now, it is night already! What has one done to-day? . . . In war, concluded this little Gallic cock, the only laborious work is that which one does in times of peace—marching on the main roads. . . .

Thus spoke these young people during the first month of the campaign. The soldiers of the Marne, of the war which goes on. If it had continued it would have re-created the race of va-nu-pieds of the Revolution, who, having set out to conquer the world, no longer knew how to stop.



It was indeed necessary that they should stop. From the moment that they became like pickles in the trenches, the tone changed. It lost its animation, its boyish indifference ; it became from day to day virile, stoical, contracted. Maxime continued to affirm the final victory. Then he ceased to speak of victory ; he spoke only of the necessary duty—of that even he ceased to speak. His letters became dull, grey, fatigued.

At home the enthusiasm had not diminished. Clerambault persisted in vibrating like the pipe of an organ. But Maxime did not give back the expected and invoked echo.

SUDDENLY, he arrived for a furlough of seven days. He had not notified his coming. On the stairway he stopped, his legs were heavy ; although he seemed more robust, he became quickly tired ; he was affected. He recovered his breath, and ascended. When the bell rang, his mother came to open the door. She cried out with excitement. Clerambault, who was wandering through the room, in the ennui of the eternal waiting, ran, shouting. There was a fine uproar.

After several minutes, there was a truce to embraces, and to inarticulate language. Pushed towards a window, seated well in the light, Maxime was exposed to the inspection of their delighted looks. They went into raptures over his complexion, his full cheeks, and his appearance of good health. His father, opening his arms to him, called him, " My hero." And Maxime, with the hands clasped, felt suddenly the impossibility of speaking.

At the table, their eyes rested on him, they drank in his words ; he said almost nothing. The exaltation of his own people had silenced him, right at the start. Happily, they did not notice this ; they attributed his silence to fatigue and also to hunger.

Besides, Clerambault spoke for two. He recounted to Maxime the life of the trenches. The good Madame Pauline had become a Cornelia of Plutarch. Maxime looked at them, ate, and looked at them ; a gulf was between them.

At the end of the repast, when, having returned to the father's room, they saw him installed in an arm-chair and smoking, it was indeed necessary to satisfy the expectation of these poor people. He began then to describe soberly how his days were employed ; he modestly left out of his story anything in the nature of exaggeration and of tragic pictures. They listened palpitating with expectation. They were still all ears, even when he had finished. Then came from them a battery of questions. Maxime replied in a very few words.

Clerambault tried to waken up " his gallant " by a few jovial thrusts.

" Now then, tell us a little . . . one of your engagements . . . that must have been fine . . . that joy, that sacred joy : . . . Lord . . . I wish I could see that, I would like to be in your place . . . "

Maxime replied :

" If you wish to see all those beautiful things, you are better in your own."

Since he had gone to the trenches he had never seen a battle, and scarcely a German ; he had seen the mud and he had seen the water. But they did

not believe him. They thought he was speaking in a contrary way, as he used to do when a child.

"Joker!" said Clerambault, with a good laugh, "then, what do you do, all day, in the trenches?"

"One keeps out of the way; one kills time. It is the greatest enemy."

Clerambault gave him a friendly tap on the shoulder.

"You kill also other things!"

Maxime turned aside, saw the kind curious look of his father and mother, and said:

"No, no, speak of something else!"

And after a moment:

"Will you be good enough to do me a favour? Do not question me any more to-day."

They acquiesced, astonished. They concluded that in his fatigued condition he required to be looked after, and they did him little services. But Clerambault, in spite of himself, set out again in apostrophes which sought approbation. The word "Liberty" punctuated his tirades. Maxime wore a pale smile and observed Rosine. The attitude of the young girl was singular. When her brother had come in, she threw herself on his neck. But after that, she kept herself reserved, one would have thought, at a distance. She had not taken part in the questions of the parents; so far from provoking the confidences of Maxime, she appeared to fear them; the insistence of Clerambault troubled her;

the fear of what her brother might say showed itself in imperceptible movements or fugitive looks which Maxime alone observed. He experienced the same constraint : he avoided being alone with her. However, they had never been closer in spirit. But it would have cost them too much to say why.

Maxime was under the necessity of letting himself be shown to the acquaintances of the neighbourhood ; he was taken out in Paris, by way of entertaining him. In spite of its robes of mourning the town had reassumed its laughing face. Miseries and sufferings hid themselves at the fireside, and at the bottom of proud hearts. But the eternal Fair, in the streets and in the crowd, exposed its satisfied mask. The people of the cafés and the tea shops were ready to hold out for twenty years, if need be. Maxime, with his people, seated at a little pastry table, amid the joyous hum of the conversation and the perfume of the ladies, saw the trench where he had just been bombarded, twenty-six days on end, without being able to budge from the trench, glutinous and gorged with dead bodies which served for walls. . . . His mother's hand was placed on his. He woke up, saw the affectionate eyes of his people questioning him ; he reproached himself for making these poor people anxious ; and smiling, he began to talk gaily. His big boy heartiness had returned. The face of Clerambault, over which a shadow had

passed, cleared itself again ; and his look innocently thanked Maxime.

He was not, however, at the end of his alarms. Coming out of the pastry shop—(he was leaning on the arm of his son)—they encountered in the street a military funeral. There were wreaths, uniforms, an old man of the Institute, his sword at his legs, and instruments of brass which played a heroic lamentation. The crowd stood by respectfully, and Clerambault, stopping, uncovered with emphasis ; his left hand pressed more firmly the arm of Maxime. He felt him start, and, looking at his son, found him with a strange air ; he thought that Maxime was affected, and wished to take him away. But Maxime did not move. Maxime was confused.

“ A death,” thought he. “ All that for one death. But down there, one walks on them. . . . Five hundred dead according to the list, that is the normal allowance.”

He had a bad little laugh. Clerambault, frightened, pulled him by the arm :

“ Come ! ” said he.

They went away.

“ If they saw,” thought Maxime, “ if these people saw. . . . All their society would crack. . . . But they will never see, they do not wish to see. . . . ”

And his eyes, cruelly sharp, discovered suddenly around him . . . *the enemy*: the lack of conscience of the world, the foolishness, the egoism, the

luxury, the "I don't care a damn" spirit, the immoral profit of the war, the delight in war, the whole-hearted lying . . . the sheltered people, the "embusqués," the people connected with the police, the "obusiers" with their insolent autos which resemble cannons, and their high-booted women, with red noses, these ferocious gluttons of bon-bons. . . . They are content. . . . All is going well. . . . One half of humanity eats the other half.

They returned home. In the evening, after dinner, Clerambault was burning to read to Maxime a poem which he had just written ; the purpose of it was touching, and a little absurd ; in his affection for his son, he tried to be, in spirit at least, his companion of glory and of suffering ; and he had described—from a distance—" *Dawn in the trenches.*" Twice he rose to get the manuscript. But when he held the leaves, a feeling of modesty paralysed him. He sat down again, with empty hands.

The days passed. They found themselves strictly united, by the ties of the body, but their souls never succeeded in touching one another. No one would admit it, and each one knew it. A sadness was between them ; they refused to see the true cause of it ; they preferred to attribute it to the approach of the departure. From time to time, the father, or the mother, made a new attempt to re-open the source of intimacy. Each time it resulted in failure. Maxime perceived that he had not any means of

communicating with them—with anybody at home. They were living in different worlds. Would they never understand one another any more? However, he understood them; he himself had experienced, recently, the influence which disturbed them; he was only sobered down in consequence of his contact with suffering and with death. But precisely because he had been touched he knew the impossibility of curing the others with arguments. Therefore, he kept quiet, and, allowing others to speak, smiled vaguely, and gave his opinion without listening.

The pre-occupations at home, the clamourings of the papers, the demands of persons (and what persons: of old buffoons, politicians tarnished and withered!), the bragging patriots with the strategies of the desk, the alarms about stale bread or the sugar card or of days when the pastry shops would be shut, inspired in him a disgust, an ennui, an infinite pity, for this race at home. It was a foreign race to him.

He confined himself in an enigmatic silence, smiling and dull. He only came out of it by fits, when he thought of the time there remained to share with these poor people who loved him. Then he began to speak with animation. It did not matter about what. The important thing was to give his voice since he could not give his thought. And naturally, one fell back on the commonplaces of the day. The



general questions, political and military, took the first place. They would have been as well to read their paper aloud. "The crushing of the Barbarians," the "triumph of Right" characterised the speeches and the thoughts of Clerambault. Maxime served the mess and said, when there was a break, "*cum spirito tuo.*" But both waited for the other *beginning to speak*. . . .

They waited so long that the day of separation came. A short time before he went away, Maxime entered the room of his father. He had resolved to explain himself :

"Father, are you really quite sure ?" . . .

The trouble which shewed itself on the face of Clerambault prevented him from continuing. He pitied him, and asked if his father was quite sure of the hour of departure. Clerambault welcomed the end of the question with a too visible relief. And when he had given the information—to which Maxime did not listen—he bestrode again his oratorical horse, and launched out with his habitual idealist declamations. Maxime, discouraged, kept quiet. During the last hour, they spoke only nothings. All felt, except the mother, that they were keeping quiet about the essential thing. Words cheerful and confident, an apparent excitement. In the heart, a groan : "My God ! My God ! Why has thou forsaken us ?"

Maxime went away, relieved to return to the

front. The ditch which he had just observed between the battlefield and home seemed to him to be deeper than that of the trenches. And the greatest murderer was not the cannons. But Ideas. Seated at the window of the carriage which was leaving, he followed with his eyes the affected faces of his people as they receded in the distance, and he thought :

“ Poor people. You are their victims ; and we are yours. . . . ”

THE day after his return to the front the great Spring offensive, which the loquacious newspapers announced to the enemy several weeks before, was let loose. The hope of the nation had been fed with it during the gloomy winter of waiting and of death immovable. The nation was stirred up by a humming of impatient joy. It was sure of victory and cried "At last."

The first news seemed to give it proof. They only mentioned, as the right thing, the losses of the enemy. Faces beamed. The parents whose sons, the women whose husbands were down there, felt proud that their flesh and their love were taking part in the bloody love-feast; in their exaltation scarcely did they stop to think that their own might be a victim. And the fever was such that Clerambault, an affectionate, loving father, anxious for those whom he loved, came to fear that his son might not be back in time for the "fête"; he wished that he might be; his ardent wishes thrust him there, throwing him into the pit; he sacrificed him, he disposed of him and his life, without troubling himself as to whether the will of his son was in agreement. He no longer belonged to himself and

he could not have imagined that anyone related to him should belong to himself, any more than he. The obscure will of the anthill had devoured all.

However, a remnant of the habit of mind which analyses itself made him on the spur of the moment find again some traces of his former nature ; like a sensitive nerve which is touched—a dull blow, a shadow of grief. It passes, one denies it . . .

At the end of three weeks the exhausted offensive trampled over the same kilometres of shambles. The newspapers began to distract attention, by tendering at the same time a new scent. Maxime had not written since he had gone. One sought the ordinary reasons for patience, which serve the turn of the complaisant mind ; but the heart does not believe in them. Eight days more passed. Among themselves, each of the three affected assurance. But at night, each in their own room, the soul cried with anguish. And all along the hours, the ear was stretched, watching each step which ascended the stairway—the nerves at breaking point, at the tingling of the bell, at the rustling of a hand which passed near the door.

The first official news of the losses began to arrive. In several families, friends of the Clerambaults, they knew already their dead and their wounded. Those who had lost all envied those whose loved ones, bleeding, mutilated perhaps, would at least be given back. Several enveloped themselves with

their dead like the night ; for them the war was finished, life was finished. But on the part of others persisted strangely the exaltation of the beginning ; Clerambault saw a mother whose patriotism and whose grief almost caused her to rejoice at the death of her son. She said with a violent and concentrated joy :

“ I have given all ! I have given all ! . . . ”

Like one who in the obsession of the last moment, before disappearing, drowns herself through love with her beloved.

But Clerambault, more feeble, or awakening from his dazed condition, thought :

“ I also have given all—even that which did not belong to me.”

He went to the military authorities. They could give no information. Eight days later came the news that Sergeant Clerambault, Maxime, was classed as “ missing ” since the night of the 27th or 28th of the past month. At the offices in Paris, Clerambault was not able to obtain any other detail. He left for Geneva, visited the Red Cross, the Prisoner's Agency, learned nothing, obtained permission to question in the hospitals or depots behind the lines, comrades of his son, who gave contradictory information—(one said he was a prisoner, the other had seen him dead, then both, the following day, agreed that they had been deceived. . . . O tortures ! God of vengeance !)—returned after ten

days from this way of the Cross, aged, broken, exhausted.

He found his wife in a paroxysm of noisy grief, which, on the part of this good-natured creature, had turned into furious hate against the enemy. She cried for vengeance. For the first time Clerambault did not reply to it. There no longer remained to him enough strength to hate—just enough to suffer.

He shut himself in his room. During his frightful pilgrimage of ten days scarcely had he found himself face to face with his thought. A sole idea hypnotised him, night and day. Like a dog on a scent ; quicker, to go quicker. The slowness of the carriages and of the trains irritated him. He had come to this, that, after having engaged a room for the night, he left the same evening, without wishing to rest. This fever of haste and of expectation devoured all. It made impossible (and that was his salvation) all connected reasoning. But now the chase was at an end, and the mind, breathless and dying, was finding itself anew.

Clerambault was now certain that Maxime was dead. He had not said so to his wife. He had kept quiet about certain pieces of information which robbed him of hope.

She was one of those who have a vital need of retaining, even against all reason, a glimmer of the illusion which deludes them, until the main part of

the tide of grief has spent itself. And perhaps Clerambault himself had been one of those also. But he was not one of them now ; for he saw where this illusion had led him. He did not yet judge. He did not try to judge. He lay in his state of mental darkness. And too feeble to raise himself, to grope around, he was like someone who, after a fall, moves his bruised body, and renews at each pang consciousness of life, and tries to understand what has happened. The dull abyss of this death fascinated him. This beautiful child that had given one so much joy, so much suffering to obtain, to educate, all that richness of hopes in flower, this little priceless universe which is a young man, this tree of Jesse, these centuries of the future. . . . And all that destroyed, in an hour. . . . For what ? For what ?

It was necessary to persuade himself at least that it was for something grand and necessary. Clerambault clung to this buoy in despair, during the days and nights which followed. If his fingers unclenched, he would sink like a stone. More emphatically still he affirmed the sacredness of the cause. He refused, besides, to discuss it. But his fingers, little by little, were gradually slipping ; each movement made him sink ; for each new attestation of its justice and its right caused to surge up from his conscience a voice which said :

“ Even if you had twenty thousand times more

right in the struggle, is your maintained right worth the disasters with which it must be paid? Will your justice demand that millions of innocents should fall, a ransom for the errors and iniquities of others? Is crime cleansed by crime, murder by murder? And is it necessary that your sons should be not only victims but accomplices, be assassinated and assassins? . . .”

He pictured again the last visit of his son, their last conversation, and he pondered over them. How many things he understood now, that he had not understood! The silences of Maxime, the reproach of his eyes. . . . The worst of it all was when he recognised *that he had understood them* already, when his son was there, but that he had not wished, not wished to agree to them.

And this discovery, which for several weeks he felt weighing on him like a menace—this discovery of an interior lie—crushed him.



ROSINE CLERAMBAULT, up to the actual crisis, appeared to be effaced. Her interior life was unknown to the others and almost to herself. Her father had scarcely a glimmer of it. She had lived under the wing of the warm, egotistical, stifling affection of the family. She had hardly any friends, comrades of her own age. Her parents interposed themselves between her and the outside world ; she had accustomed herself to grow up in their shadow ; and if, having become adolescent, she aspired to evade it, she did not dare to do so, she did not know how to do so ; she was put about as soon as she went out of the circle of the family ; her movements were paralysed, she could scarcely speak ; she was judged to be insignificant. She knew it and suffered from it, because she was possessed of a certain pride. Therefore, she went out as little as possible, and remained in her own environment, where she was simple, natural, and of few words. This silence did not come from a torpor of thought, but from the talkativeness of the others. The father, the mother, the brother were exuberant. The little person confined herself by reaction. But she spoke within herself.

She was fair, tall, slender, with pretty hair, of which the tresses escaped to the cheeks. Her mouth was large and serious, her lower lip a little swollen at the end, her eyes large, calm and vague, her eyebrows fine and well marked. She had a graceful chin, a pretty neck, no hips ; her hands were a little red and large, and the veins swollen. Blushing for a nothing. The charm of youth was in the forehead and the chin. The eyes interrogated, dreamed, gave away very little.

Her father had a preference for her, as the mother for the son ; there were affinities between them. Without thinking about it, Clerambault had never ceased to monopolise his daughter, to encircle her, since infancy, with his absorbing affection. He had carried out, in part, her education. With the innocence, sometimes a little unpleasant, of the artist, he had made her the confident of his inner life. He was led to do so by his overflowing nature, and by the feeble echo which he found in his wife ; this good person who was, as it is said, at his feet was installed there ; she said yes to all that he said, admired and trusted him, but did not understand him, and did not even notice it ; for the essential thing for her was not the thought of her husband, but her husband, his health, his well-being, his comfort, his food, his clothes. The honest Clerambault, full of gratitude, did not judge his wife, any more than Rosine judged her mother. But the

instinct of both knew what to think of it, and bound them by a secret tie. And Clerambault did not notice that he made his daughter his real wife, of mind and heart. He only began to have a suspicion of it latterly when the war seemed to break the tacit agreement which reigned among them, and the assent of Rosine, like a vow which bound her, suddenly failed him. Rosine knew things long before him. She avoided exploring the mystery of them. In order to know, the heart does not require that the mind be warned.

Strange and magnificent mysteries of the love which unites souls ! It is independent of the laws of society and even of nature. But very few people know it ; and fewer still dare to reveal it ; they are afraid of the coarseness of the world, which will have superficial judgments and sticks to the dense meaning of the traditional language. In this conventional language, voluntarily inexact, by social simplification, the words take good care, not to express in revealing them, the living shades of the multiple reality ; they imprison it, they enrol it, they codify it ; they place it at the service of the reason which has been itself tamed, of the reason which does not spring up from the depths of the mind, but from the shallow and walled-in pools—like a fountain at Versailles—within the framework of constituted society. In this quasi-legal vocabulary, love is bound up with sex, with age, with classes of society ;

and according as it conforms to the required conditions, it is or is not natural, it is legitimate or not. But that is only a trickle of water drawn from the profound sources of love. The immense Love, which is the law of gravitation which moves worlds, cares nothing for the schemes which we plan for it. It fulfils itself between souls far separated from it by space and time ; above the centuries it unites the thoughts of the living and the dead ; it binds close and pure ties between young and old hearts ; it makes friend closer to friend ; it often makes the heart of the child nearer to that of the old man, than are husband and wife in the whole course of their lives.

Between fathers and children these ties exist sometimes without their knowing it. And " the world " (as our old people used to tell us) counts so small in comparison with love eternal, that it happens that between father and children the affinities may be interchanged, and that the child may not be the younger of the two. How many sons experience a paternal love for the old mother. And do we not feel very small and humble before the eyes of a child ? The Bambino of Botticelli directs towards the innocent virgin his look charged with a sad unconscious experience and which is as old as the hills.

The affection of Clerambault and of Rosine was of this essence, august, religious, to which the reason had no access. That is why, in the depths of the

troubled sea, far below the troubles and the conflicts of conscience which the war unloosed, an intimate drama unfolded itself, without gestures, almost without words, between those two souls united by a sacred love. This unavowed affection explained the delicacy of their mutual reactions. At the beginning, the dumb remoteness of Rosine, disappointed in her love, vexed in her secret worship by the attitude of her father, whom the war misled, caused her to draw away from him like a little antique statue chastely draped. Immediately the disquiet of Clerambault, whose sensitiveness was sharpened by love, had perceived this *noli me tangere* ! It was followed, during the period which had preceded the death of Maxime, by an unexpressed disagreement between the father and the daughter. They did not dare speak (the words are so coarse) of "amorous anger" in the most refined sense. This intimate disagreement which no word would have caused them to admit was to them both a pain, troubled the young girl, and irritated Clerambault. He knew the cause of it, and his pride refused at first to recognise it ; little by little he was no longer very far from admitting that Rosine was right. He would have liked to humiliate himself, but his tongue remained tied by a false shame. Thus the misunderstanding of their minds became worse, when their hearts implored them to yield.

In the confusion which followed the death of

Maxime, this supplication became more pressing on the soul less able to resist. One evening they were all three at dinner—(it was the only time they were reunited, for each one isolated himself; Clerambault prostrate in his mourning, Madame Clerambault always in a state of agitation to no purpose; and Rosine, all the day absent, occupied with “works”)—Clerambault heard his wife who was questioning violently Rosine; the latter was talking of caring for the enemy wounded, and Madame Clerambault was angry, as if to do so would be a crime.

She appealed to the judgment of her husband. Clerambault, whose eyes, tired, vague, and sorrowful, began to understand, looked at Rosine, who said nothing, her face lowered, awaiting his reply. And he said :

“ My little girl is right.”

Rosine reddened with excitement (she did not expect it). She raised towards him her eyes which thanked him; their look seemed to say :

“ At last ! I have found you ! ”

After the brief meal all three separated; each one fretted alone. Before his desk Clerambault, with his face buried in his hands, wept. The look of his daughter had loosened his heart, which had been stiffened by grief; it was his lost soul, stifled for months, the same as before the war, which he had found again; and it looked at him. . . .

He wiped away his tears and listened at the door.

. . . His wife, as she did every evening in Maxime's room, the door double-locked, disarranged and arranged the linen, the effects of the dead. . . . He entered the room where Rosine was alone, seated near the window, sewing. She was absorbed in her thoughts ; she only heard him when he was standing before her ; he leaned his head, now growing grey, against her and said :

“ My little girl. . . .”

Then her heart melted away also. She allowed her work to fall, she took between her hands the old head of rough hair, mixing her tears with those which she saw flowing :

“ My dear papa ! . . .”

Neither the one nor the other needed to ask to explain why he was there. After a long silence, when he had recovered his calm, he said, looking at her :

“ It seems to me that I have awakened from a frightful aberration of mind. . . .”

She caressed his hair without speaking.

“ But you were watching over me, were you not ? I have marked it well. . . . You were suffering ? . . .”

She nodded, without daring to look at him. He kissed her hands, raised himself and said :

“ My good angel you have saved me.”

HE returned to his bedroom.

She remained without moving, transpierced with emotion. For a long time she remained thus, with her head lowered, her hands clasped on her knees. The waves of feeling which surged within her took away her breath. Her heart was heavy with love, happiness and shame. The humility of her father threw her into confusion. . . . And suddenly a spring of love and of passionate piety unloosed her from the paralysis which bound her limbs and her soul, stretched her arms towards the absent one, and made her throw herself in confusion at the foot of her bed, thanking God and praying him that he might preserve all the grief for her, and that he might give happiness to the one she loved.

But the God to whom she prayed took no account of her prayer ; for it was on the eyes of the young girl that he poured the good sleep of forgetfulness ; but Clerambault was doomed to climb up his Calvary, right to the summit.

In the obscurity of his room, his lamp extinguished, Clerambault looked within himself. He was determined to penetrate to the bottom of this lying and fearful soul which fled from him. The hand of



his daughter, the freshness of which he still felt on his forehead, had wiped out his hesitations. He had decided to look the monster, Truth, in the face, even if he should be lacerated by its talons, which never let go, after they have got a grip.

With anguish, but with a courageous hand, he began to tear off in bleeding rags the envelope of mortal prejudices, of passions and of ideas foreign to his soul which covered it entirely.

First of all, the thick fleece of the beast of a thousand heads, the collective soul of the herd. He had taken refuge there through fear and lassitude. It is a dirty quilt, which keeps warm and which suffocates ; when one is engulfed there, one can no longer make a single movement towards getting out, and one no longer wishes to do so ; one need think no more, or wish any more ; one is sheltered from the cold, from responsibilities.

Laziness and cowardice. . . . Now then ! Push it away.

Immediately through the cracks the icy wind enters. One starts backwards. . . . But already this gust has shaken the torpor ; the vitiated energy gets on its feet again, totteringly. What is it going to find outside ? No matter ! It is necessary to see. . . .

His heart stirred up with disgust, he saw at first what he would not have believed possible—how far this thick fleece was buried in his flesh. He smelt in

it something like a far-away musty smell of the primitive beast, the unacknowledged savage instincts of the war, of murder, of spilled blood, of the palpitating flesh which the jaws grind. The elemental Force of death for life. At the bottom of the human being, the slaughter-house in the ditch, which civilisation, in place of filling up, screens with the fog of its lies, and over which floats the nauseous odour of butchery. . . . This noisome breath completed the disillusionment of Clerambault. He tore off with horror the skin of the beast of which he was the prey.

Ah ! how heavy it was ! It is at the same time hot, silky, beautiful, stinking, and bloody. It is composed of the lowest instincts and the most sublime illusions. To love, to give oneself to all, to sacrifice oneself for all, to be but one body and one soul, the Homeland alone living ! . . . But what then is this Homeland, this only life, to which one sacrifices not only his life, all lives, but his conscience, all consciences ? And what is this blind love, of which the other face of Janus with the blinded eyes is a blind hate ? . . .

" . . . One has very inappropriately dissociated the name of reason from that of love," said Pascal, "and they have been opposed without a sound foundation for doing so, for love and reason are one and the same. Love is a surging forward of thoughts, which tends in one direction without

thoroughly examining all ; but nevertheless it is a kind of reason . . .”

Very well, let us examine all !—But is not this love precisely, only, to a large extent, the fear of examining all, the child which, that it may not see the shadow on the wall, hides its head under the bedclothes ?

Country ? A Hindu temple ; men, monsters and gods. What is it ? The mother earth ? The entire earth is the mother of us all. The family ? It is here and there, both with enemy and with me, and wishes only for peace. The poor, the workers, the people ? They are, on both sides, equally miserable, equally exploited. The men of learning ? They have a common field ; and as regards their vanities and their rivalries, these are as ridiculous in the Orient as in the Occident. The world does not fight any more for the quarrels of Vadius and Trissotin. The State ? The State is not the Country. The only ones who create the confusion are those who profit by it. The State is our strength, which is used and which is abused by a few men like us, who are not better than us, and who are often worse, of whom we are not the dupes, and whom in time of peace we judge freely. But when war comes they are given *carte blanche*, they can appeal to the vilest instincts, stifle all control, kill all liberty, kill all truth, kill all humanity ; they are masters, it is necessary to close the ranks, to defend the honour

and the errors of these Mascarilles clothed in the garb of masters ! We are responsible it is said. Terrible network of words : We are no doubt responsible for the best and the worst of our peoples. It is a fact, we know it well. But that it is a duty which binds us even to their injustices and their insanities,—I deny it ! . . .

There is no question as to the community of interest. No one (thought Clerambault) has more passionately than I tasted its enjoyment and celebrated its grandeur. It is good, it is healthy, it is refreshing and strengthening, to plunge the solitary egotism, naked, stiffened and frozen, in the bath of trust and of fraternal offering which is the collective soul. One unbends himself, one gives himself, one breathes. ( Man has need of others, and he has duties towards others. But he is not bound to give up all. For what would then remain to him to give to God ? He is bound to give to others. But, if he is to give, he must have, he must be. Now, how *could he be* if he becomes one with the others. There are many duties ; but the first of all is *to be* and to remain oneself, even while sacrificing and giving oneself. The bath in the soul of all could not become a permanent condition without danger. Let one soak in the bath for the sake of hygiene ? But one must come out under penalty of losing all moral vigour ! In our age, one is plunged from infancy, willing or unwilling, into the democratic tub.

Society thinks for you, its morality is imposed on you, its State acts for you, its fashion and its opinion steals from you even to the air that you breathe, you renounce your breath, your heart, your life. You serve that which you despise, you lie in all your gestures, your words, your thoughts, you abdicate, you are no more. . . . And much profit for all, if all have abdicated ! For the advantage of whom ? of what ? Blind instincts or of rogues ? Is it a God who commands or a few charlatans who make the oracle speak ? ) Lift the veil ! Look into the face of that which is hidden behind ! . . . The Homeland . . . The great word ! The beautiful word ! The father, the interlaced arms of brothers ! . . . But that is not what you give me. Your false country's an enclosure, a beasts' hole, with trenches, barriers, prison bars ! . . . My brothers ! Where are my brothers ? Where are those who toil in the world ? Cains, what have you done with them ? I stretch out my arms to them ; a river of blood separates me from them ; in my own nation, I am only an anonymous instrument, which must murder. . . . My Country ! But it is you who kill it ! . . . My Country was the great community of men. You have destroyed it. Neither thought nor liberty have a habitation in Europe. . . . I am obliged to rebuild my house, the home of us all. For you have now none : yours is a dungeon. . . . What will I do ? What will I seek ? Where will I shelter ? . . .

They have taken all from me ! There is not an inch of the earth, nor of the spirit which is free ; all the sanctuaries of the soul, of art, of science, of religion—they have violated all, they have enslaved all ! I am alone and lost. I am left with nothing. I fall ! . . .

When he had torn away everything there remained nothing but his naked soul. To the end of the night it remained shaken and numbed. But in this soul which shivered, in this minute being lost in the universe like one of those shapes which primitive painters used to represent as coming out of the mouths of the dying, a spark shewed. After the dawn, an imperceptible flame began to burn, which the heavy cover of lies stifled. At the breath of free air, it kindled itself. And nothing could hinder it from growing.

SLOW and grey day, which follows this agony, or this childbirth. Great broken repose. Vast unusual silence. In a state of well-being ; the aching relief of duty performed . . . Clerambault, motionless, and with his head leaning on the back of the arm-chair, was dreaming, his body feverish, his heart heavy with memories. Tears flowed without his knowing it. Outside melancholy nature, in the last days of winter, was awakening, trembling like him, and unclothed. But under the frostiness of the air, a new fire flickered.

Soon it will set fire to everything.

## PART TWO

AFTER eight days Clerambault recommenced going out. The terrible crisis that he had just traversed left him broken but resolute. The advancement of despair had ceased ; there remained to him the stoical wish to pursue truth to its last retreats. But the memory of the wandering of mind to which he had conformed, and of the half-lies on which he had fed, made him humble. He distrusted his powers ; and wishing to go step by step, he was ready to accept the counsels of guides more experienced than himself. He remembered how Perrotin listened to his confidences of not long ago, with an ironical reserve, which irritated him then, and which attracted him to-day. And the first visit of his convalescence was to his wise friend.

Although Perrotin was a better observer of books than of faces—(somewhat short-sighted and a little egotistical, he did not trouble much to examine closely that which he had no need of)—he could not help being struck with the alteration in the features of Clerambault

“ My good friend,” said he to him, “ you have been ill ? ”



"Very ill, in fact," replied Clerambault. "But I am getting better now."

"Yes, it is a cruel blow," said Perrotin : "to lose, at our time of life, a friend such as your poor child was to you. . . ."

"The cruellest part is not to lose him," said Clerambault ; "it is to have contributed to his loss."

"What do you say there, my friend," said Perrotin, surprised. "What have you found to add to your pain ?"

"I have closed his eyes," said Clerambault bitterly, "and he has opened mine."

Perrotin completely dropped the work that he was continuing to ruminate upon (according to his custom when one was speaking to him), and began to observe Clerambault curiously. The latter, with lowered head, and with a hollow voice, sad and passionate, began his story. One would have thought that it was an early Christian making his public confession. He accused himself of lying, of lying towards his faith, of lying towards his heart, of lying towards his reason. The cowardice of the apostle had caused him to deny his God, when he had seen him in fetters ; but he had not degraded himself to the point of offering his services to the executioners of his God. He, Clerambault, had not only deserted the cause of human fraternity, he had degraded it ; he had continued to speak of fraternity, in exciting hatred ; like these lying priests who

take advantage of the Gospel to put it at the service of their wickedness, he had knowingly perverted the most generous ideas in order to cover with their mask the passions of murder ; he represented himself as being a pacifist, while praising war ; he said that he was a humanitarian, while throwing the enemy, as a preliminary, outside of humanity. . . . Ah ! how much more frank it would have been to abdicate before brute force than to lend himself to degrading compromises with it. It was thanks to sophisms like his that the idealism of the young men was thrown into the butchery. The thinkers, the artists, the old poisoners sweetened with the honey of their rhetoric, the beverage of death, which without their duplicity, the universal conscience would soon have discovered, and rejected with disgust. . . .

“ The blood of my son is on me,” said Clerambault, painfully. “ The blood of the young men of Europe, in all the nations, spurts out in the face of the thought of Europe. Thought has made itself everywhere the servant of the executioner.”

“ My poor friend,” said Perrotin, bending towards Clerambault and taking his hand, “ you always exaggerate. . . . Certainly you are right to recognise the errors of judgment to which you have been led by public opinion, and I may tell you now that those ideas which you held troubled me. But you are wrong to attribute to yourself, to attribute to the talkers, such a responsibility for the facts of to-day !

The ones speak, the others act ; but it is not those who speak who make the others act ; they all go off the track. This poor European thought is a waif like the others. The current drags it along ; it does not cause the current."

"It induces people like you to give way to it," said Clerambault ; "instead of assisting those who swim and crying to them : ' Struggle against the flood,' it says : ' Allow yourselves to be carried away.' No, my friend, do not attempt to diminish the responsibility. It is heavier than any other, for our thought was in better position to see, its duty was to be on the watch, and if it has not seen, it is because it has not wished to see. It cannot accuse its eyes ; its eyes are good. You know it well, and I know it also, now that I have taken hold of myself again. This same intelligence which blindfolded my eyes, is that which has just torn off the bandage. How could it be, at the same time, a power for falsehood and a power for truth ? "

Perrotin shook his head.

"Yes, the intelligence is so great and so high that it is not able, without degrading itself, to place itself at the service of other powers. It is necessary to give all to it. As soon as it is no longer free and mistress, it disgraces itself. It is the Greek degraded by the Roman, his master, and although superior to him, obliged to make himself his servant. *Graeculus* the sophist. *Le Laeno*. . . (The mob intends to use the

intelligence as a maid of all work. It performs it with the dishonest and cunning skill of that species. Presently it is in the pay of hatred, of pride, or of interest. The intelligence flatters those petty monsters, it clothes them in idealism, love, faith, liberty, social generosity (when a man does not love men, he says that he loves God, his Country, or even Humanity). Presently the poor master of the intelligence is himself a slave, a slave of the State. Under the menace of chastisement, the social machine constrains him to perform acts which are repugnant to him. The complaisant intelligence soon persuades him that those acts are fine, glorious, and that he may perform them freely. In the one case, as in the other, the intelligence knows what to think of it. It is always at our disposal, if we truly wish that it should tell us the truth. But we take good care that it does not. We avoid looking it in the face. We arrange things in such a way as to encounter it only in public, and we address to it questions in a tone which commands the replies. . . . At the end of the reckoning the earth continues to turn, *e pur si muove*, and the laws of the universe are accomplished, and the free spirit sees them. All the rest is vanity ; the passions, faith, sincere or fictitious, are only the painted expressions of Necessity, which drags along the world, without care for our idols ; family, race, country, religion, society, progress. . . . Progress ? The great Illusion. Is

humanity not submissive to a law of level, which means that when one gets beyond it, a valve opens and the container empties itself? . . . A catastrophic rhythm. . . . Summits of Civilisation and then tumbling down again. One ascends. One takes the plunge. . . .”

Perrotin tranquilly unfolded his thought. It was not accustomed to show itself naked ; but it forgot that it had a witness ; and, as if it were alone, it unclothed itself. It was of an extreme boldness, as is often the case with a great thinker who is not compelled to act, and who has no desire at all to do so ; much on the contrary ! Clerambault, frightened, listened with open mouth, certain words shocked him, others wrung his heart ; and he became dizzy ; but overcoming his weakness, he did not wish to lose anything of these half-revealed profundities.

He pressed Perrotin with questions, and he flattered, and smiling, complacently unfolded pyrrhonian visions, both peaceable and destructive. . . .

They were enveloped by the vapours of the abyss, and Clerambault admired the ease of this free spirit, seated at the edge of the chasm, and delighting in it, when the door opened, and the servant handed to Perrotin a visiting card. The formidable visions of the mind scattered at once, a trapdoor fell over the chasm, and the official carpet of the room covered the spot again. Perrotin, awakened, said with eagerness :

“Certainly. . . . Show the visitor in ! . . .”

And turning towards Clerambault :

“Will you permit me, my dear friend ? This is the Under Secretary of State for Public Instruction. . . .”

Already he had risen and went to meet the visitor, —a young chief, with a blue chin, a face shaved like a priest’s, or an actor’s, or a yankee’s. He carried his head high, and his torso bulged in a grey jacket, which flourished the ribbon of heroes, and of valets. The old man, now brightened up, performed the introduction :

“Monsieur Agenor Clerambault . . . Monsieur Hyacinthe Moncheri . . .” and asked “Monsieur the Under Secretary of State ” what caused him to do him the honour of his visit.

Monsieur the Under Secretary of State, in no way surprised at the obsequious reception of the old master, strutted towards his arm-chair with an air of familiar superiority, which his rank warranted, over the two specimens of French thought ; he represented the State. He spoke through his nose, and bellowed like a dromedary. He conveyed to Perrotin the invitation of the minister to preside at a solemn session of the intellectual warriors of ten nations in the grand amphitheatre of the Sorbonne —“An imprecatory session,” as he said. Perrotin accepted it with eagerness, appearing to be confounded with the honour. His obsequious tone

towards the ninny breveted by the Government contrasted strangely with the temerity of his discourse, a moment ago. And Clerambault, shocked, thought of *Graeculus*.

When they were alone again, after Perrotin had conducted to the door his "cheri," who walked with a stiff neck and a high head like a donkey loaded with relics, Clerambault wished to renew the conversation. He was a little cooled, and did not conceal the fact. He invited Perrotin to proclaim in public the sentiments that he had expressed to him. Perrotin refused, naturally, laughing at the ingenuousness of the idea. He warned him affectionately against the temptation to air his opinions. Clerambault was angry, argued, and was obstinate. Perrotin in a vein of sincerity, in order to enlighten him, described to him his environment, the great intellectuals of the eminent university of which he was the official representative; historians, philosophers, orators, rhetoricians. He spoke of them with a veiled contempt, polite, but profound, and which was mixed with a touch of personal bitterness; for in spite of his prudence, he was too intelligent not to be suspect to the least intelligent of his colleagues. He described himself as an old blind dog in the middle of barking mastiffs, and obliged like them to bark at the passers by. . . .

Clerambault left him without disagreement, but with a great pity.

It was several days before he went out again. This first contact with the exterior world had depressed him. The friend in whom he had counted to find a guide had failed piteously. He felt himself full of trouble. Clerambault was feeble ; he was not accustomed to find his way alone. This poet, although so sincere, had never been obliged to think without the help of others ; up till then he had had no need but to allow himself to be carried away by their thought ; he espoused it ; he was the inspired and exalted voice of it. The change was sudden. In spite of the night of trial, he was seized again by his uncertainties ; nature cannot, at a single blow, be transformed, especially in the case of one who has passed fifty years, however flexible the springs of his mind have remained. And the light which a revelation brings does not always remain, like the sparkling surface of the sun in a summer sky.

It resembles rather an electric light, which flickers and goes out more than once before the current becomes regular. In the syncopes of this jerky pulsation, the shadow appeared blacker, and the spirit more tottering. Clerambault did not make up his mind to do without others. He resolved to go



round his friends. He had many of them, in the world of letters, in connection with the university, and among the intelligent bourgeoisie. It could not be possible that among that number he would not find some spirits who, like himself, better than himself, had some intuition regarding the problems which beset him, and who might aid him to clear them up. Without yet giving himself up, he tried timidly to read from them, to observe. But he did not perceive that his eyes were changed ; and the vision that he had of a world, however well-known, appeared to him new and froze him.

All the people of letters were mobilised. There was no more distinction of personalities. The universities constituted a tamed ministry of intelligence ; its duties were committed to writing the acts of its master and patron, the State. The different services were recognisable by their professional flaws.

The professors of letters were, above all, experts in the moral development in three points of the oratorical syllogism. They had the mania of excessive simplification in reasoning, used big words for reasons, and misused clear ideas, which were few in number and always the same, without shades and without life. They took them down from the arsenal of a soi-disant classical antiquity, of which the key had been jealously guarded, down through the ages, by generations of academical mamelukes. These ideas, eloquent and aged, which were erron-

ously called "Humanities," even when on many points they wounded the good sense and heart of humanity of to-day, had received the stamp of the Roman State, prototype of all European States. Their accredited interpreters were orators at the service of the State.

The philosophers reigned in abstract construction. They had the art of explaining the concrete by the abstract, the real by its shadow. They systematised several hasty observations, partially chosen, and by means of their retorts extracted from them laws for governing the universe. They applied themselves to subjecting the multiple and changing life to the unity of the mind—that is to say of *their* mind. This imperialism of the reason was favoured by the complaisant profligacies of a sophistical trade, broken to the handling of ideas ; they know how to stretch, to lengthen, twist and knot together, as with marsh-mallow dough ; it would not have been difficult for them to make a camel pass through the eye of a needle ! They could quite well prove that white was black, and found when they wanted to, in the works of Immanuel Kant, the liberty of the world, or Prussian militarism.

The historians were the born scribes, the notaries and solicitors of the State, appointed custodians of its charters, titles and official reports, and armed to the teeth for future disputes. . . . History. What is history ? The history of success, the demonstra-

tion of the accomplished fact, whether it be just or unjust ! The conquered have no history. Silence for you, Persians of Salamis, slaves of Spartacus, Gauls, Arabs of Poitiers, Albigenses, Irish, Indians of the two Americas, and Colonial races ! . . . (When a good man, up against the injustices of his time, puts, to console himself, his hope in posterity, he shuts his eyes to the meagre means that this posterity has of being instructed about past events. Posterity knows about it only what the writers of official history judge to be advantageous to the cause of their client, the State. Unless the advocate of the adverse party intervenes—it may be of another nation, it may be of an oppressed social or religious group. But there are few chances ; the mystery is well guarded.)

Orators, sophists and “ *procéduriers* ” ; the three corporations of the Faculty of Letters, of Letters of State, signed and patented.

The “ *Scientifics* ” would be through their studies, a little better protected from the suggestions and contagious of the outside—if they remained at their trade. But they were compelled to leave it. The applications of the sciences have taken such a place in practical reality that the scientists were thrown into the first ranks of action. They were obliged to experience the infectious contact of the public mind. Their pride found itself directly interested in the victory of the community ;

which unites the heroism of the soldiers, the mad-  
nesses of public opinion, and the lies of the pub-  
licists. Very few have had the strength to disengage  
themselves. The great number have brought to it  
the severity, the stiffness of the geometrical spirit—  
with the professional rivalries which are always  
sharp between the corps of scientists of the different  
countries.

With regard to the pure writers, poets, novelists—  
without official ties, they should have the advantage  
of their independence. Very few, unfortunately,  
are in a position to judge for themselves events  
which are outside their habitual preoccupations,  
aesthetic or commercial. The greater number, and  
not the least illustrious, are as ignorant as fishes.  
The best thing would be for them to remain can-  
tonised on their bookshelf, and their natural in-  
stinct would maintain them there. But their vanity  
has been foolishly tickled and has induced them to  
meddle with public affairs, and to say their say on  
the universe. They can only speak at random. In  
default of personal judgments they take their inspira-  
tion from great currents. Their reactions under the  
disaster are extremely active, for they are ultra-sen-  
sitive, and of sickly vanity, which, when it cannot  
express its own thoughts, exaggerates the thoughts  
of others. It is the only originality they possess, and  
God knows they use it !

What remains ? The church people ? These are

they who handle the greatest explosives ; the ideas of Justice, of Truth, of Goodness, of God ; and they place this artillery at the service of their passions. Their insensate pride, of which they are not even conscious, claims the property of God, and the exclusive right of purveying it wholesale and retail. They do not lack so much sincerity, or virtue, or even kindness as they lack humility. They have none of it, although they profess to have. That which they practise consists in adoring their navel reflected in the Talmud, the Bible or the Gospel. They are monsters of pride. They are not so far from the legendary madman who believed himself to be God the Father. Is it much less dangerous to think oneself his steward, or even his secretary ?

Clerambault was struck by the morbid character of the intellectual people. The preponderating influence which the faculties of organisation and expression of thought has obtained among a bourgeois caste has something monstrous about it. The vital equilibrium is destroyed. It is bureaucracy of the mind which believes itself very superior to the simple worker. Certainly, it is useful . . . who thinks of denying it ? It gathers together, and classes thought in its pigeon-holes and makes various constructions of it. But rarely the idea comes to it of verifying the materials that it works with, and of renewing the contents of its thought ! It remains the vain guardian of a worn-out treasure.

If this error were simply inoffensive ! But ideas which are not constantly confronted with reality, which are not continually bathed in the waters of experience, become, in the drying-up process, of a poisonous character. They spread over the new life their heavy shadow, which creates night and causes fever. . . .

Stupid idolatry of abstract words ! What good purpose does it serve to dethrone kings, and what right to jeer at those who die for their masters, if it is to substitute for them tyrannical entities and reclothe them with their tinsels. Better far a monarch of flesh and bone that can be seen, that can be handled, and that can be suppressed. But these abstractions, these invisible despots, which no one knows, no one has ever known ! . . . For we have only to do with the Grand Eunuchs, with the priests of the "hidden crocodile" (as Taine called it), with intriguing ministers, who make the idol speak. Ah ! would that the veil might tear and that we might know the beast which conceals itself in us. There would be less danger for man to be an open brute, than to clothe his brutality in a lying and unhealthy idealism. He does not eliminate his animal instincts ; but he defies them. He idealises them and attempts to explain them. As he cannot do this without submitting them to an excessive simplification (it is a law of his mind, which, in order that it may understand, destroys as much as it takes), it

changes their nature in intensifying them, in an unique direction. Everything which deviates from the line prescribed, everything which incommodes the narrow logic of its mental structures, he does more than deny, he destroys, in the name of sacred principles. For that reason, in the living infinity of nature, he accomplishes the destruction of an immense number of trees, in order to give life to the sole trees of thought which he has chosen ; they develop in the desert and among ruins monstrously. Such is the tyrannising empire of a despotic form of the Family, of Country, of the confined morality, which is placed at their service. Unfortunate man is the victim of it ; and he is proud of it ! Humanity which massacres itself would not dare to do it for its own interests. Of interests it does not boast, but it boasts of its ideas, which are a thousand times more murderous. Man sees in Ideas, for which he fights, his superiority as man. And I see there his folly. War-like idealism is a malady which belongs to him alone. Its effects are like those of alcoholism. It increases a hundred-fold wickedness and criminality. Its intoxication impairs the brain. It peoples it with hallucinations, and sacrifices the living to it.

What an extraordinary spectacle it is seen from the interior of skulls ! A heap of phantoms, which smoke with feverish brains ; Justice, Liberty, Right, Country. . . . All these poor brains equally sincere, all accusing the others of not being so ! In this

fantastic battle between legendary shadows one sees nothing outside but the convulsions and the cries of the human animal, possessed by herds of demons. . . . Above, the clouds are charged with lightnings, where great furious birds fight ; the realists, the men of business, crawl and gnaw like lice in a fleece ; greedy mouths, rapacious hands, exciting cunningly the follies they exploit without taking part in them. . . .

O Thought, flower monstrous and splendid, which springest up in the soil of secular instincts !

. . . Thou art an element. Thou penetratest man, thou impregnatest him ; but thou dost not come out of him. Thy source escapes him, and thy power goes beyond him. The senses of man are almost adapted to his practical use. His thought is not. It overflows him and drives him mad. Some individuals, in number infinitely restricted, succeed in guiding themselves on this torrent. But it drags along the enormous majority, at random, and at full speed. Its formidable power is not at the service of man. Man attempts to employ it, and the greatest danger is when he believes that he employs it. He is like a child who handles explosives. There is no proportion between those colossal engines and the object for which his weak hands employ them. Sometimes they blow up everything. . . .

How can the danger be avoided ? Stifle thought, pluck out all the intoxicated ideas ? That would be



to take away man's brain, deprive him of the principal stimulant of his life. Still, however, the stimulant of thought contains a poison the more formidable, because it is spread among the masses as adulterated drugs. Man, make yourself sober ! Consider ! Come out of ideas. Make yourself independent of your own thought ! Learn to command thy gigantomachy, those enraged phantoms which tear one another to pieces . . . Country, Right, Liberty, Great Goddesses, we will uncrown you straightway of your capitals. Descend from Olympus to the cradle, and come unadorned, unarmed, rich with your beauty alone, and with our love ! . . . I do not know the gods, Justice and Liberty, I know my brother men and I know their acts, sometimes just, sometimes unjust. And I know the peoples who are deprived of true liberty, but who all aspire to it, and who all, more or less, allow themselves to be oppressed.

THE sight of this world a prey to a violent fever would have inspired in a sage the desire to go into retirement, and to allow the paroxysm to pass. But Clerambault was not a sage. He knew merely that he was not one. He knew that to speak was vain ; yet nevertheless he knew that it would be necessary for him to speak, he knew that he would do it. He sought to delay the dangerous moment ; and his timidity, which could not inure itself to the idea of standing alone, at variance with all, sought round about for a companion in thought. Even if there were only two or three, when together it would be less difficult to engage in battle. The first whose sympathy he went discreetly to try were poor people, who, like himself, had lost a son. The father, a well-known painter, had a studio, Rue Notre-dame-des-Champs. The Clerambaults visited the Omer Calville family. They were a good old couple, very bourgeois, well united. They had that gentleness of thought, common to a number of artists of that time, who had known Carrière, and had received remote reflections of Tolstoyism ; like their simplicity it seemed slightly fictitious, although it corresponded with an affability of nature ; but the

fashion of the day has put on it one or two strokes too many.

No one is less capable of understanding the passions of the war than those artists who profess with a sincere emphasis a religious reverence for all that which lives. The Calvilles stood outside the current ; they did not protest, they accepted it, but as one accepts illness, death, the wickedness of men, sadly, in a dignified way without acquiescing. They had listened politely, though with little sympathy, to the impassioned poems of Clerambault, when he read them to them. . . . But now that Clerambault, disabused of the war-like illusion, thought of rejoining them, they were far from him, for they had returned to the place that he had just left. The death of their son had had an effect quite different to that which transformed Clerambault. Now they entered awkwardly into the battle, as if to restore the lost one ; they inhaled greedily the stench of the newspapers. Clerambault found them delighted, amid their distress, by the assertion that America was ready to carry on a war lasting twenty years. He tried to say :

“ What will remain of France, of Europe, in twenty years ? ”

But they turned aside from this thought, with an irritable haste. It seemed that it was unbecoming to think of it, and above all, to speak of it. Victory was the question. At what price ? That could be

counted afterwards.—To conquer? And if there did not remain in France any conquerors?—No matter! Provided that the others, down there, were conquered! No, it would not do that the blood of their son should have been poured out in vain.

And Clerambault thought:

“Is it necessary, to avenge him, that other innocent lives should be sacrificed?”

And, in the heart of these good people, he read:  
“Why not?”

He read it in the heart of almost all those in the same position as the Calvilles, people from whom the war had taken a dear one—a son, a husband, or a brother.

“Other people ought to suffer also! We have suffered much! We have no more to lose. . . .”  
No more? Yes, indeed—one thing, which the ferocious egoism of those griefs retained jealously: their faith in the utility of the sacrifice. May nothing come to shake it! It is forbidden to doubt that the cause is holy, the cause for which their dead had fallen. Ah! they knew it well, the directors of the war, and they knew how to exploit that delusion! No, there was no room at those firesides of grief, for the doubts of Clerambault and his spirit of pity.

“Who has had pity on us? thought these unhappy people. Why should we have pity? . . .”

There were some who had suffered less; but what characterised almost all those bourgeois, was

the influence under which they lived of the great words of the past, "Committee of Public Safety" . . . "The Country in danger" . . . "Plutarch" . . . "*De Viris*" . . . "Old Horace" . . . It was impossible for them to look at the present with the eyes of to-day ! But had they eyes to see ? Outside the narrow circle of their business, how many, over thirty years of age, in the anaemic bourgeoisie of to-day, have the power to think for themselves ? They do not even dream of doing so ! Their thought is supplied to them ready-made, like their food, and more cheaply. For one or two sous per day, they find it in their press. The more intelligent people, who look for it in books, do not trouble to look for it in life and expect that life is the reflection of books. Like precocious old men their limbs are ankylosed, the mind is petrified.

In the vast herd of those cud-chewing souls who graze on the past, the group of bigots of the French Revolution was conspicuous. They had proved to be firebrands in the remote past—at the period of the sixteenth May, and some time after, among the backward bourgeoisie. Such were the people over fifty years of age, grown stolid and settled, who recalled with pride that they were bad boys ; they lived on the memory of the emotions which stirred up their boldness in years gone by.

If they had not changed for their mirrors the world round about them had changed. But they

did not suspect ; they continued to copy their worn-out models. Curious instinct of imitation, servitude of the brain, which remains hypnotised by something which has passed. In place of following in his course Proteus—the changing life—it gathers up the old skin, from which the young serpent has long since escaped. And it would like to sew it up in it again. The pedantic devotees of dead revolutions claim that those of the future should be based on these tombs. And they do not admit that a new liberty walks with another step, and leaps over the barriers where its grandmother of '93, out of breath, was obliged to stop. They are still more vexed by the want of respect of the young people who overtake them, than by the wrathful bawling of the old people whom they have overtaken. It is not without reason ; for these young people reveal to them that they have become old ; and they bawl at them.

Such will always be the case. Very few ageing minds allow life to carry on, and when their eyes grow dim are generous enough to enjoy the future through the eyes of their juniors. But the greater part of those who as young people loved liberty wish to make a cage for the new broods, when they themselves can no longer fly.

The internationalism of to-day did not find more malicious adversaries than certain servants of the revolutionary nationalist cult after the fashion of

Danton, or even of Robespierre. They themselves did not always agree among themselves ; and Danton's followers and those of Robespierre, still kept apart by the shadow of the guillotine, called one another heretics. But they were in agreement as to consigning to the severest torments those who do not believe that liberty is carried at the mouth of cannons, those who dare to have the same aversion to violence whether it may be exercised by Caesar, by Demos, or by leather-dressers. And were it even in the name of Right or of Liberty. The mask may change. Underneath, the mouth is the same.

Clerambault knew several of these fanatics. It was not a question of discussing with them if the Right or the Crooked were not found, in war, on more than one side. It would have been as much use for a Manichean to have argued with the Holy Inquisition. The secular religions have their great seminaries, and their secret societies, where is preserved proudly the foundations of the doctrine. Whosoever turns aside from it is excommunicated—until he himself, in his turn, is of the past ; then he will have the chance of becoming also a god ; and in his name, the future will be excommunicated.

But if Clerambault was not tempted to convert these hard intellectuals, encased in their narrow truth, he knew others who did not possess in the slightest degree this pride of certitude ; far from it !

They erred rather because of a somewhat soft suppleness and through dilettantism—Arsene Asselin, who was one of these, was a good-natured Parisian, a bachelor, a man of the world, intelligent and sceptical, whom an error of taste offended both in feeling and expression. How had he been able to please himself with the excesses of thought, which form the medium of culture in which war develops? His critical spirit and his irony were bound to incline him to doubt; there was no reason why he should not understand the reasons of Clerambault! . . . He was not far from thinking like him. His choice had depended on fortuitous circumstances. But from the moment that he had started in the other direction, it was impossible to go back! And the more difficulties he became involved in, the more obstinate he became. French pride never recognises its error, it would risk death for it . . . French or not, how many are there in the world who would have the courage to say: "I have been deceived. Now then, everything will have to be begun again. . . ." It is better to deny the evidence . . . "To the end" . . . And die.

Very curious was a pre-war pacifist, Alexandre Mignon. An old friend of Clerambault, about his own age, bourgeois, intellectual, a university man, the worthiness of his life earned him well-deserved respect. He was not to be confounded with the pacifists of banquets, decorated with official orders,



and laced with big international ribbons, men for whom peace, in palavers, is, in calm years, a most secure investment. He had during thirty years sincerely denounced the dangerous intrigues of the politicians and rotten speculators of his country ; he was a member of the league of the Rights of Man, and had the itching to speak, about petty misfortunes of this person and that. It was sufficient for him that his client called himself oppressed. He did not ask himself if the self-styled oppressed was not, by chance, almost an oppressor. His blundering generosity had brought him ridicule. He was not troubled about it, even a little unpopularity would not have made him afraid—provided that he felt himself encircled by his group, whose approbation was necessary to him. He believed himself an independent. He was not so. He was one of the members of a group, which was independent, when all kept together. Union is strength, it is said. Yes, but the result in the long run is that one can no longer stand alone. Alexandre Mignon experienced it.

The disappearance of Jaurès had disconcerted the group. When a single voice, which spoke first, failed, all the others failed ; they awaited the word of command, and no one dared to give it. Uncertain, at the time the torrent fell, these generous and feeble men were dragged along by the urge of the first days. They did not understand it ; they did

not approve of it ; but they had nothing to oppose it with. From the first hour, desertions began in their ranks ; they were provoked by those hideous rhetoricians, who govern the State—the demagogue pleaders, broken to all the sophisms of the republican ideology ; “ War for Peace and Peace eternal afterwards.” (*Requiescat !*) The poor pacifists saw in these artifices an unique opportunity, if not a very brilliant one (they were not proud of it), of getting out of the difficulty ; they flattered themselves that they brought into agreement, by a great deal of talk of which they did not perceive the enormity, their principles of peace and the fact of violence. To refuse to do so would have been to yield to the pack of war ; it would have devoured them.

Alexandre Mignon would have had the courage to face the bloodstained mouths, if he had felt his little community near him. But alone, that was above his powers. Without expressing himself at first, he allowed things to pass. He suffered. He experienced anguishes quite like those of Clerambault. But he did not come out of them in like manner. He was less impulsive and more intellectual ; to efface his last scruples, he covered them with compact reasonings. With the aid of his colleagues he proved laboriously by  $a+b$  that the war was the duty of consistent pacifism. His league took good care to notice the criminal acts of the enemy ; but it did not trouble about those of its own

camp. Alexandre Mignon had momentary glimpses of the universal injustice. . . . Intolerable vision. . . . He closed his shutters. . . .

According as he swaddled himself in his logic of war, it became more difficult for him to draw out of it. Then he became excited like a child, who, by an unreflecting act of clumsy nervousness, has just torn off the wing of an insect. The insect is lost now. The ashamed child who suffers, and who is irritated, avenges itself on the creature, and tears it to pieces.

One can judge of the pleasure that he had in hearing Clerambault make to him his *mea culpa*. The effect was surprising. Mignon, already troubled, was indignant with Clerambault. In accusing himself, Clerambault appeared to accuse him. He became the enemy. No one, consequently, was more enraged than Mignon against this living remorse.

Clerambault would have encountered more comprehension on the part of a few politicians. These latter had understood things as well as he and even much better ; but they did not sleep worse on account of it. Since their first decayed tooth, they had the habit of *combinazioni*, of medleys of thought ; they gave themselves at a cheap price, the illusion of serving their party, at the price of some compromise: one more, one less ! . . . To go straight, to think straight, was the only thing impossible to these flabby creatures, who were always shuffling, whose

method of advancing was to go winding about, and even going back, and who, in order to better assure the success of their flag, dragged it in the mud, and who would have crawled on their bellies to the Capitol.

At last, a few discerning minds here and there concealed themselves. One had to guess where they were rather than see them because these melancholy glow-worms had been careful to extinguish their lanterns ; they seemed to be in trances from which not a glimmer of light emerged. Certainly, they were stripped of faith in the war, but without faith against the war. Fatalists. Pessimists.

Clerambault saw that when personal energy is lacking, the highest qualities of mind and heart help to increase still more public servitude. The stoicism which submits to the laws of the universe prevents struggling against those which are cruel. Instead of saying to Destiny :

“ No ! . . . You will not pass.”

(If it passes, one will see well)—the stoic effaces himself politely and says :

“ Come in please ! ”

Cultivated heroism, the liking for the super-human and for the inhuman, gargles the soul with sacrifices ; and the more absurd they are, the more sublime they appear. The Christians of to-day, more generous than their Master, render *all* to

Caesar ; it is enough that a cause requires of them that they sacrifice themselves, for it to appear sacred ; they offer piously to the ignominy of war the flame of their faith, and their body on the pyre. The ironical and passive resignation of the peoples shrugs its shoulders, accepts . . . "*We must not worry*" . . . And, without doubt, centuries of misery have rolled over this stone. But the stone wears out in the long run, and becomes mud.

CLERAMBAULT tried to talk with one, and with another. . . . He encountered everywhere the same mechanism of saturnine, half-conscious resistance. They were armed with the wish not to hear, or rather, by a marvellous lack of wish to hear. To contrary arguments their mind was impermeable, like a duck's feathers to water. Men in general are endowed for their convenience with a precious faculty ; they are able, at will, to make themselves blind and deaf, when it does not suit them to see and to hear ; or if, by mischance, they have seized in its passage an object which disturbs them—they let it fall and forget it immediately. In every country, how many citizens knew what to think about the divided responsibilities for the war, and about the destructive part played by their politicians, but, deluding themselves, pretended successfully that they knew nothing about it !

If everyone was running away as fast as his legs could carry him, one would have thought that they ran away still faster from those who, like Clerambault, wished to help them to stand their ground ! In order to run away, intelligent men, serious and honourable, did not blush to use petty dodges em-

ployed by a woman or a child who wishes to be in the right. Afraid of a discussion which might trouble them, they jumped at the first imprudent word of Clerambault, isolated it from the context, if necessary distorted it, blazed up, made a loud voice and with eyes bulging out of their heads, appeared indignant, and ended in being sincerely so. They repeated *mordicus*, even after the proof had been demonstrated, and having been obliged to recognise it, they went away, banging the doors ; " That is enough of that ! " Two days after, or it might be ten, they would take up again the squashed argument, as if nothing had occurred.

Some less scrupulous, provoked the indiscretion which would be of use to them, urged Clerambault with good nature to say more than he wished, and then, suddenly exploded with rage. The more kindly accused him of lacking in good sense. (" Good," means my kind of sense.)

There were also fine talkers, who, having nothing to fear from a tilt of words, welcomed the conversation, and flattered themselves that they were leading the wandered sheep back to the sheepfold. They did not argue about the basis of his thought, but about his opportunity ; they appealed to the good feelings of Clerambault :

" Certainly, certainly, you are right, at heart ; at heart I think like you, I think almost like you ; I understand you, dear friend. . . . But,

dear friend, take care, avoid troubling the consciences of the combatants. It is not good to speak all the truth, at least, not at once. Yours will be very nice . . . in fifty years. It is not good to steal a march on nature ; one must wait. . . .”

“ Wait until the appetite of the exploiters and the foolishness of the exploited are fatigued ? How do they not understand that the clear-sighted thought of the best people, which abdicates in favour of the blind thought of the most stupid, goes directly against the plans of nature which they pretend to follow, and against historic destiny, which they make it a point of honour to obey. Is it respecting the designs of nature to stifle a portion of its thought, and that the highest portion ? This conception which cuts out from life its highest power, and bends it to the passions of the multitude, would lead to supressing the vanguard and leaving the main part of the army without direction. . . . The ship leans over ; will you hinder me from going to the other side by way of counterpoise ? And must we all place ourselves on the side towards which we are leaning ? Advanced ideas are the counterpoise, provided by nature, against the oppressive past, which persists. Without them, the ship founders. With regard to the reception which will be given them, that is an accessory question. He who enunciates them can expect to be stoned. But he who, thinking them, remains silent, dishonours himself.



He is like a soldier charged with a perilous message in battle. Has he the liberty to withdraw from it? . . .”

Then when they saw that persuasion was without effect on Clerambault, they unmasked their batteries and taxed him violently with absurd and criminal pride. They asked him if he thought himself to be more intelligent than all, to oppose his judgment to that of the nation. Upon what could he found this monstrous confidence? It is one's duty to be humble and to remain modestly in one's place in the community. Duty consists in bowing down, after the community has spoken, and, whether one believe in it or not, to execute its orders. Cursed be he who rises against the soul of his people! To be in the right against it is to be in the wrong. And to be in the wrong is a crime, in the hour of action. It is the will of the Republic that its sons obey it.

“The Republic or Death!” said Clerambault ironically. “A fine country of liberty! Free, yes, because it has always had, and always will have, souls like mine, which refuse to submit to a yoke which their conscience disavows. But what a nation of tyrants! Ah! we have not gained anything by taking the Bastille! Not long ago, one incurred perpetual imprisonment, when one permitted oneself to think differently to the prince—the stake, when he thought differently to the church. At present, one must think like forty millions of men,

one must follow them in their frenzied contradictions, one must shout one day : ' Down with England ! ' ; to-morrow : ' Down with Germany ! ' ; the day after to-morrow : ' Down with Italy ! ' . . . and begin again, the week after, to acclaim a man or an idea, and then insult him the following day. He who refuses, risks dishonour or being shot ! Ignoble servitude ! the most shameful of all ! . . . And by what right do a hundred men, a thousand men, one or forty million men, require that I renounce my soul ? Each one of them has only one soul like myself. Forty millions of souls constitute too often only one soul, which has denied itself forty million times. . . . I think what I think. Think what you think ! The living truth can only be born through the equilibrium of opposed thoughts. If the citizens are to respect the city, the city must respect the citizens. Each of them has his soul. It is his right. And the first duty is not to betray it. . . . I do not delude myself. I do not attribute to my conscience an exaggerated importance in this universe of prey. But if little we may be, we must be that little ; if little we may do, we must do that little. Anyone can be deceived. But whether he is deceived or not, he ought to be sincere. The sincere error is not a lie ; it is the halting place towards the truth. The lie is to be afraid of the truth and to wish to stifle it. If you were a thousand times in the right against a sincere error—

in having recourse to force in order to crush it, you commit the most odious of crimes against reason itself. If reason is persecutor and error persecuted, I am for the persecuted. For error has rights as well as truth. . . . Truth. Truth. . . . Truth is to seek always the truth. Repeat the efforts of those who labour in its pursuit. To outrage a man who with difficulty traces out for himself a pathway, to persecute him who wishes—and may perhaps fail—to find less inhuman methods of progress, is to make of him a martyr. Your road is the best road, the only good road, you say? Follow it then, and leave me to follow mine! I do not oblige you to take mine. What irritates you? Are you afraid that I am right?"

CLERAMBAULT made up his mind to see Perrotin again. In spite of the feeling of grieved pity which his last interview had left with him, he understood better now his ironical and prudent attitude with regard to the world. If he had not much esteem for the character of Perrotin he retained entire his admiration for the great intelligence of the old scientist ; he continued to see in him a guide who would aid him to see the light.

It cannot be said that Perrotin showed any great delight at seeing Clerambault again. He was too sharp not to have retained a disagreeable recollection of the petty cowardice which he had been obliged, the other day, not only to commit (that would have been nothing ! he was accustomed to it) but to admit it tacitly, under the eyes of an incorruptible witness. He foresaw an argument, and he had a horror of arguing with people with their minds already made up. (There is no pleasure in it ! They take everything seriously !) But he was very polite, feeble, quite nice also, incapable of refusing, when one took him by assault. He tried to escape serious questions at first ; then when he saw that Clerambault had really need of him, and that per-

haps he would keep him from doing something rash, he consented, with a sigh, to give up his morning.

Clerambault described the result of his proceedings. He acknowledged that the world obeyed a faith different to his own. He had served and shared that faith ; even to-day, he was just enough to recognise in it a certain grandeur, a certain beauty. But since his last experiences, he had seen the absurdity and horror of it ; he had detached himself from it, and he had been bound to espouse another ideal, which had necessarily made him opposed to the first. This ideal Clerambault expressed in strokes brief and passionate ; and he asked Perrotin to tell him if he found it true or false. But clearly, frankly, putting aside all form of politeness, all circumlocution. And Perrotin, struck by the tragic seriousness of Clerambault, completely changed and answered in the same key.

“ Now, am I wrong ? ” demanded Clerambault, in pain. “ I can see well that I am alone ; but I cannot be otherwise. Tell me without sparing me ; am I wrong to think what I think ? ”

Perrotin replied gravely :

“ No, my friend, you are right.”

“ Then I am bound to combat the murderous error of the others ? ”

“ That is another matter.”

“ Do I possess the truth only to betray it ? ”

“ The truth, my poor friend ? . . . No, do not look at me in that way ! You think that I am going to say like Pilate : “ What is truth ? ” I love it as you do, and have done so perhaps for a longer time than you. . . . Truth, my friend, is higher and greater than you, than us, than all those who have lived, who are living, and who will live. While believing that we serve the Great Goddess, we never serve any but the *Di Minores*, the saints of the side chapels, which the crowd by turns flatters and forsakes. That saint in honour of whom the world of to-day slaughters itself, or mutilates itself with a Corybantic frenzy, evidently can no longer be yours or mine. The ideal of the Country is a great cruel god, which will leave in the future the image of a frightful Cronos ‘ croquemitaine,’ or of his son the Olympian, whom Christ has surpassed. Your ideal of humanity is the higher step in the ladder, the announcement of the new god. And that god will himself be dethroned later on by another higher still who will embrace more of the universe. Life and the ideal never stop evolving. This constant growing is for a free mind, and veritable interest of the world. But if the mind is able to go at breakneck speed, in the world of facts one advances step by step ; and during a whole lifetime, one hardly gains a few inches of ground. Humanity walks with difficulty. Your crime, your only crime, is to be ahead of it by one or several days’ journey. But that

crime is amongst those which are least forgiven. . . . Not without reason, perhaps. . . . When an ideal becomes old, like that of Country, along with the form of society that strictly depends on it, it becomes exasperated and flies into a furious passion ; the lightest blow at its legitimacy makes it ferocious ; for already doubt has entered its own soul. Make no mistake about it. These millions of men who murder one another in the name of patriotism no longer possess the youthful faith of 1712 or of 1813, although it causes to-day more ruins and tumult. Many of those who die, and even of those who cause killing, feel, at the bottom of their souls, the horrible sting of doubt. But, caught by the pinion wheels and too feeble to escape, or even to conceive a way of safety, they blindfold their eyes and throw themselves into the abyss, whilst affirming with despair their wounded faith. They would consign to the abyss also, by the fury of unacknowledged vengeance, those who, by their words or by their attitude, have sown the seeds of doubt in them. To wish to take away the illusion from those who die for it, is to wish to make them die twice."

Clerambault stretched out his hand, to stop him.

" Ah ! you have no need to tell me what tortures me. Do you think that I do not feel the anguish of shaking the unfortunate souls ? To spare the faith of the others not to give offence to a single one of these little ones. . . . God ! But what is to be

done? Help me to get out of this dilemma whether to allow the evil to continue, and allow the others to perish—or risk doing them an injury, wounding them in their faith. What is the law?”

“To save oneself.”

“To save myself is to lose myself, if it is at the expense of the others. If we do nothing for them—(you, I, all efforts are not too much)—ruin is imminent for Europe, for the world. . . .”

Perrotin, very calm, the two elbows leaning on the arms of the arm-chair, his hands joined on his Buddha-like drum, and twiddling his thumbs, regarded Clerambault good-naturedly, shook his head and said :

“Your generous heart, your artistic sensitiveness, deceive you, happily, my friend. The world is not almost finished. It has seen many others! And it will see still more. What is happening to-day is certainly very painful, but by no means abnormal. War has never hindered the earth from turning, nor life from evolving. It is even one of the forms of its evolution. Permit an old scientist, a philosopher, to oppose your holy Man of Sorrows with the calm inhumanity of his thought. Perhaps you will find there, in spite of everything, some benefit. This crisis which frightens you, this great *mêlée*, is nothing more, in sum, than a simple phenomenon of contraction of the heart, a cosmic contraction, tumultuous and ordinate, analogous to the foldings



of the earth's crust, accompanied by destructive tremblings. Humanity contracts. And the war is its earthquake. Yesterday there were at war, the provinces in each nation ; the day before yesterday, in each province the towns. Now that national unities are accomplished, a vaster unity works itself out. It is evidently regrettable that this should be by violence. But it is the natural means. From the explosive mixture of elements which clash with one another, a new chemical body will be born. Will it be the West or Europe ? I do not know. But surely the compound will be endowed with new properties, richer than the components. But it will not stop there. If the war that we are witnessing is fine . . . (I beg your pardon ! Fine to the eyes of the mind, for which suffering no longer exists) . . . finer still, more ample, are being prepared. These good children of men who imagine that they construct by cannon shots eternal peace ! . . . We must first of all wait until the entire universe has passed through the retort. The war between the two Americans, that between the New World and the Yellow Continent, then that between the conqueror and the rest of the world . . . that is enough to keep us going for several centuries ! And I have not very good sight, I do not see everything. Naturally, each of these encounters will have as a rebound some good social wars. When everything has been brought to pass, in ten centuries (I am inclined to believe, how-

ever, that it will be more rapid than it would seem from comparison with the past, for motion accelerates in the fall), we will reach no doubt a slightly impoverished synthesis ; a number of constituent elements, the best and the worst, will be destroyed en route, the first being too delicate to resist bad weather, the second too harmful and decidedly irreducible. These will be the famous United States of the earth ; their union will be all the more solid if, as is probable, humanity finds itself menaced by a common danger : the canals of Mars, the drying up of the planet, the freezing of the planet, mysterious plague, the pendulum of Edgar Allan Poe, the vision of inevitable death descending on the human race . . . what magnificent things will be seen ! In these supreme agonies, the spirit of the Race will be over-excited. As for the rest, little of liberty. The human multiplicity, on the point of disappearing, will create for itself a Unity of Will. Do we not tend in that direction at present. Thus will be effected, without abrupt change, the reintegration of the compound to one, from the Hatred to the Love, of old Empedocles."

" And after ? "

" After ? It will be begun again, without doubt, after a stage. A young cycle. A new Kalpa. On the reformed wheel, the world will begin to turn again."

" And the word of the enigma ? "

" The Hindoos would reply : ' Siva,' ' Siva,' who

destroys and who creates, who creates and who destroys."

"What a frightful dream!"

"A matter of temperament. Wisdom frees. For the Hindoos, Buddha sets free. For myself, the desire for knowledge is a sufficient adjuvant."

"It is not for me. And I am not able longer to content myself with the wisdom of the egotistical Buddha, which liberates itself, in abandoning others. I know the Hindoos, like you, I love them. Even with them Buddha has not said the last word of wisdom. Remember this Bodhisattva, the Master of Pity took the oath not to become Buddha, not to take refuge in the liberating Nirvana, before having healed all the sicknesses, redeemed all the crimes, consoled all the griefs.

Perrotin leaned towards the sorrowful face of Clerambault, with a kindly smile, petted affectionately his hand, and said :

"My dear Bodhisattva, what do you want to do? Whom do you want to save?"

"Oh I know well," said Clerambault, lowering his head, "I know well the little that I am, I know well the little that I am able to do, the insanity of my wishes and of my protestations. Do not think me so vain! But what can I do, if my duty commands me to speak?"

"Your duty is to do that which is useful and reasonable; it cannot be to sacrifice yourself in vain."

"And what do you know of that which is in vain? Are you sure in advance of the grain which will germ-

inate, and of that which will grow rotten, sterile. Is that a reason for not sowing ? What progress would ever have been accomplished, if he who carried a germ of it had stopped, terrified, before the block, enormous and ready to crush him, of the routine of the past ? ”

“ I understand that the scientist defends the truth which he has found. But as for you, is this social action your mission ? Poet, preserve you dreams, and may your dreams preserve you ! ”

“ Before being a poet, I am a man. Every honest man has a mission.”

“ You possess treasures of mind too precious. It is murder to sacrifice them.”

“ Yes, you leave the sacrifice to the petty people, who have not much to lose . . . ”

He was silent for a moment and then resumed.

“ Perrotin, I have often thought ; we are not doing our duty. All of us, men of thought, artists. . . . Not only to-day. For a long time. Always. ( We have in us a share of the Truth, glimmers, which we keep back prudently. I have had, more than once, an obscure remorse. But then, I was afraid to look. Experience has taught me to see. We are privileged people ; and that places duties on us. We do not discharge them. We are afraid of compromising ourselves. The élite of the mind is an aristocracy, which aims at succeeding to that of the blood ; but it forgets that the latter began by paying with its blood for its privileges. For centuries

humanity has heard many words of wisdom ; but it has rarely seen learned men sacrificing themselves. That, however, would not do the world much harm, if one saw some, as in heroic times, placing their life as a stake for their thought. Nothing fruitful can be created without sacrifice. If others are to be convinced, it is necessary that one should oneself believe, it is necessary to prove that one believes. It does not suffice that a truth exist in order that men see it. It must have life. This life we are able, and we ought, to give to it—ours. Otherwise all our thoughts are only the games of dilettanti, a theatre, which has no right to anything but the applause of the theatre. The men who make humanity advance are those who make of their lives a footstool. It is in this that the son of the carpenter of Galilee surpasses our great men. Humanity has understood to distinguish between them and the Saviour.”)

“ Did he save humanity ?

‘ When Jahveh speaks : “ ’tis my desire,”  
His people work to feed the fire.’ ”

“ Your circle of fire is the supreme terror. Man only exists in order to break it, to attempt to get out of it, to be free.”

“ Free ? ” said Perrotin with his calm smile.

“ Free ! The highest good, as exceptional as the name is common. As exceptional as the real beauty, the real good. By free, I mean he who is able to disengage himself from himself, from his

passions, from his blind instincts, from those of his environment, and from those of the moment, and not to obey his reason, as it is called—(the reason, in the sense that you understand it, is a snare, is another passion, hardened, intellectualised, and, therefore, fanaticised)—but to attempt to see above the clouds of dust which rise from the herds in the road of the present, to embrace the horizon in order to place that which passes, in the ensemble of things and the universal order.”

“And then,” said Perrotin, “to accommodate oneself afterwards to the laws of the universe.”

“No,” replied Clerambault, “to oppose them with conviction, if they are contrary to happiness and to good. For it is in that itself that liberty consists, that the free man is to himself alone a law of the universe, a conscious law, charged to be a counterpoise to the crushing machine, to the Automaton of Spitteler, to the *Ananké* of brass. I see the universal Being, three-fourths of it still in the mud, or in the shell, or in the stone, submitting to the implacable laws of matter in which it is encrusted. It has only sight and breath free. ‘I hope,’ says the look. And the breath says, ‘I will.’ And sustained by them it seeks to release itself. The look, the breath constitute the free man.”

“The look is enough for me,” said Perrotin softly.

Clerambault replied : “If I have not the breath, I die.”

BETWEEN the words and the action some time elapses, with a man of thought. Even after he has decided what to do he finds pretexts for putting off till to-morrow. He sees too well what will follow, the struggles and sufferings ; and for what result ? In order to deceive his uneasiness he indulges in forcible words, alone, or with his intimate friends. He thus gives himself, cheaply, the illusion of acting. But he does not believe in it, at bottom ; he awaits, like Hamlet, until occasion forces him.

Clerambault, so brave with his talk to the indulgent Perrotin, had scarcely returned home before his uncertainties began again. His sensitiveness, refined by misfortune, perceived the emotions of the beings who surrounded him ; it made him imagine the discord which his words would cause between his wife and him. More, he did not feel himself sure of the assent of his daughter ; he would not have been able to say why, but he was afraid to put it to the test. The risk was painful for an affectionate heart.

In the meanwhile, a doctor friend wrote to him that he had in his charge at the hospital a wounded man, who had participated in the offensive of

Champagne and had known Maxime. Clerambault hastened to see him.

He found in a bed a man of doubtful age, bound up like a mummy, lying on his back, immovable. His thin dark peasant's face was wrinkled, and a large nose, and grey hair, emerged from white bandages. The right fore-arm, which was free, was allowing a rough deformed hand to rest on the sheet. A part of the middle finger was wanting, but that did not count ; it was an injury received in peace. Under the bushy eyebrows, the eyes were calm and clear. One did not expect to find this grey light in this burnt face.

Clerambault approached, and asked how he was. The man at first thanked him, politely, without giving details, as if it were not worth speaking of himself :

" I thank you very much, Monsieur. I am getting on well, I am getting on well." . . .

But Clerambault insisted affectionately ; and the grey eyes were not long in seeing that there was in the blue eyes looking down something more than curiosity.

" But where were you wounded ? " asked Clerambault.

" Oh, well ! Monsieur, that will take too long to tell. There is a little everywhere."

And pressed by questions :

" There are wounds here and there. Everywhere



that there is room. I am, however, not very big. I would never have thought that there was so much room in my body."

Clerambault succeeded in learning that he had received almost twenty wounds—to be exact, seventeen. He had been literally sprinkled (he said interlarded) by a shrapnel.

"Seventeen wounds!" exclaimed Clerambault. The man corrected himself.

"To tell the truth, I have no more than ten left."

"The others are healed?"

"My legs have been cut off."

Clerambault was so moved that he almost forgot the purpose of his visit. So many miseries! My God! What are ours—a drop in the ocean! He placed his hand on the rough hand and pressed it. The calm eyes of the man looked Clerambault up and down; they saw the crape on the hat; he said:

"You also have had misfortunes?"

Clerambault collected himself.

"Yes," said he; "you knew, didn't you, Sergeant Clerambault?"

"Surely I knew him."

"He was my son."

A look of pity.

"Ah! my poor Monsieur! . . . Surely I knew him, your brave little boy! We were together for almost a year. And that counts, that year! During the days, the days, in the earth like moles, in the

same hole. . . . Ah ! we have shared the misery together." . . .

" Did he suffer much ? "

" Indeed, Monsieur, it was hard sometimes. The lad was ill. Especially at the beginning. Was not accustomed to it. As for us, we were accustomed to it."

" You are from the country ? "

" I was a labourer at a farm. There one lives the life of the animals ; one lives something like the animals. . . . Although, Monsieur, to tell the truth, man to-day treats man worse than the animals. . . . '*Be kind to animals*' : there was in our trench a joker who hung up this placard. . . . But what is not good for them is good enough for us. . . . That is all right. . . . I do not complain. That is the way. And when it is necessary, it is necessary. But as for the little sergeant, one saw that he was not accustomed to it. Everything, the rain and the mud, and the wickedness, and above all the filthiness, everything that one touches, that one eats, and on oneself, the vermin. . . . At the beginning, several times I have seen him almost crying. Then I went to assist him, to chaff him, to cheer him up—but without seeming to do so, for he was proud, the little one, and did not wish to be assisted !—but was well pleased to be assisted, all the same, and I equally so. We had to stand together. Finally, he had become as enduring as myself ; in his turn he

helped me. And he never complained. We even laughed together. For it is indeed necessary to laugh : there is no misfortune which sticks ! That compensates for the ill-luck."

Clerambault listened, oppressed. He asked :

"Then, he was not so sad, towards the end ?"

"Yes, Monsieur, he was very resigned. We were all resigned as well. We do not know how that happens ; we all get out of bed on the same side every day ; we do not resemble one another ; but we end by resembling the others more than ourselves. It is better, we have fewer hardships, we feel ourselves less, we form a heap. . . . The only thing is leave. After, those who return from leave—just like the little sergeant, when he returned for the last time . . . that is bad, he no longer feels well."

Clerambault, his heart wrung, said quickly :

"Ah ! when he returned . . . ?"

"He was much oppressed. I have never seen him so downcast as on that day." . . .

An expression of pain shewed itself on the features of Clerambault. At a gesture which he made, the wounded man, who was looking at the ceiling while speaking, turned his eyes toward him, saw and understood, no doubt, for he added :

"But he got better again."

Clerambault again took the hand of the patient :

"Tell me what he told you. Tell me all." The man hesitated and said :

"I no longer remember very well."

He closed his eyes and remained immovable.

Leaning over him Clerambault tried to see what those eyes saw under their shutters.

. . . A moonless night. The air icy cold. From the bottom of the deep trench, one saw the cold sky and the fixed stars. Bullets rattled on the hard ground. Squatted in the trench, his knees up to his chin, Maxime and his companion, side by side, were smoking. The youngster had just returned from Paris, during the day.

He was overwhelmed. He did not reply to questions ; he enclosed himself in a stern silence. His companion had left him all afternoon to appease his suffering ; he watched him from the corner of his eye and, in the darkness, feeling that the moment had come, he had approached him. He knew that the youngster of his own accord was going to speak. The ricochet of a bullet over their heads caused a clod of frozen earth to fall.

"Look here, gravedigger," he remarked, "you are in too big a hurry."

"Better that this should be finished," said Maxime, "since they all wish it."

"To please the Huns, you are willing to give them your skin. You are very kind to them !"

"It is not only the Huns. They all lend a hand in the gravedigging."

“ Who ? ”

“ All. Those at home from where I come, those in Paris, friends and relations ; the people on the other side of the grave, the live ones. As for us, we are already dead.”

There was a silence. A projectile screamed in the sky. His companion inhaled a puff of smoke.

“ Well, youngster, things did not go well with you at home.”

“ I expected that.”

“ Why ? ”

“ When one worries and the other doesn't, one has nothing to say.”

“ They suffer also, however.”

“ But it is not the same thing. Although you may be skilful, you will never explain to one who has not experienced it what toothache is.

“ Go then and make them understand, those who sleep in their beds, what goes on here ! . . . It is not new for me. No need to be at war ! I have seen that, all my life. You think that, when I was working on the soil, and when I was sweating all the fat from my bones, that other people were worrying about it ? It is not that they are bad. Neither bad nor good. Just like the rest of the world. They cannot understand. To understand, one must experience. Undertake the task. Undertake the work. If not—and it is not, my boy—the only thing left is to resign oneself to it. Do not attempt to explain.

The world is as it is ; one can change nothing in it."

"That would be too frightful. It would no longer be worth while living."

"How the deuce ? As for me, I have endured it well. You are not of less worth than I. You are more intelligent ; you can learn. To endure, that can be learnt. Everything can be learnt. And then, to endure together, that is not quite a pleasure, but it is not quite a torture. It is being alone that is hardest. You are not alone youngster."

Maxime looked him in the face, and said :

"Down there I was alone. I am no longer alone here."

But the man with the closed eyes, stretched out on the bed, said nothing of that which he had seen again. Reopening calmly his eyes, he saw again the anguished look of the father, who entreated him to speak.

Then with an awkward and affectionate good-nature, he tried to explain that if the youngster was sad, it was probably because he had left his own people, but that *they* had cheered him up. They understood his suffering. As for himself, he, a cripple, had never had a father ; but when he was a child, he imagined, that for those who had one, how lucky they must be. . . .

"Then I took the liberty. . . . I spoke to him

Monsieur, as if I were you. . . . The youngster grew calm. He said that, at the same time, one owed one thing to this war ; that is that it had shewn that there are many poor people in the world who do not know one another, who are made of the same material. It is said that we are brothers, according to the faiths, on the placards, or in sermons ; only we do not believe it ! To know it, we must have worked hard together. . . . Then, he kissed me."

Clerambault got up and, leaning over the swaddled face, kissed the wrinkled cheek of the wounded man.

"Tell me what I can do for you," he said.

"You are very kind, Sir. There is not much to do now. I am, as it were, finished. Without legs, a broken arm, broken in health . . . what am I good for ? Besides, it is not known yet if I will recover. That will be as it may be. If I go away, bon voyage ! If I remain, the only thing to do is to wait. There will always be trains."

Clerambault admired his patience. The other repeated his refrain !

"I am used to it. Patient, there is no merit in being so, when one cannot be otherwise ! . . . We know it. A little more, a little less . . . War, that is life."

Clerambault perceived that, in his egoism, he had not asked anything yet about his life ; he did not even know his name.

"My name? Ah! it is very fitting! Courtois Aimé I am called. . . . Aimé, that is my Christian name. For one who has ill luck—it fits me like a glove. . . . And Courtois, over and above that. There is a fine treat! . . . I have never known my own people. I am an Adopted Child. The foster-parent, a métayer of Champagne, took upon himself the duty of bringing me up. He understood how to do it, the good man! . . . I have been well fashioned. At least, I soon learned what was awaiting me in life. Ah! it has rained in my porringer!" . . .

Afterwards, he recounted in a few short sentences, dry, and without emotion, the series of misfortunes which composed his life; marriage with a girl like himself, without a penny, "hunger which married thirst," illnesses, deaths, struggle against nature—that would be nothing, if man did not add lies . . . *Homo homini* . . . *homo* . . . all the social injustice which weighs on the lower orders. Clerambault was not able to conceal his revolt while listening. Aimé Courtois was in no way affected. That is the way of it. That is the way of it. It has always been so. Some are made to pine away. Others not. No mountains without valleys. The war appeared to him to be idiotic. But he would not have moved a finger to prevent it. Thus was exemplified in his make-up, the fatalist passivity of the people, which, on the soil of the Gauls, veils itself with ironical



carelessness. The "Faut pas s'en faire !" of the trenches.—And there was also that hurtful bashfulness of the French, who don't fear anything so much as ridicule, and would risk death twenty times for an absurdity, and known by them to be such, rather than raillery for an act of unaccustomed good sense. Oppose the war ! As soon wish to oppose the thunder ! When it hails, there is nothing to do but to try, if one can, to cover over the cold-frames, and then after, to go round the ruined crop. And one will begin again, until the next hail shower, until the next war, until the end of time, "Faut pas s'en faire !" . . . The idea did not come to him that man can change man.

Clerambault was secretly irritated at this heroic and silly resignation which the privileged classes have good reason to be pleased with, for they owe to it their existence—but which makes of the human race and its age-old effort a vessel of the Danaïdes, since all its courage, its virtues, and its labours are expended, in dying well. . . . But when his eyes rested on the trunk of the man stretched out before him, an infinite pity cramped him. What could he do, what could he wish, this man of misery, this symbol of the people sacrificed, mutilated ? So many centuries he suffers and bleeds under our eyes, while we, his more fortunate brothers, only gave him from afar some negligent praise, which does not trouble our complacency and engages him to con-

tinue ! What aid do we give him ? Neither actions nor words. These movements of thought, which we owe to his sacrifices, we retain the fruit of, for ourselves ; we do not dare to let him taste them ; we are afraid of the light ; we are afraid of impudent opinion and of the masters of the hour who say : “ Extinguish it ! You who have the light, endeavour to prevent anyone seeing anything of it, if you wish to be pardoned ! . . . ” Enough of cowardice ! Who will speak, if not we ? The others die, under the gag. . . .

A cloud of suffering passed over the face of the wounded man. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling. His large twisted mouth, obstinately closed, did not wish to reply. Clerambault went away. . . . He was resolute. The silence of the people, on its bed of agony, decided him to speak.

### PART THREE

CLERAMBAULT returned from the hospital, and shutting himself up in his room, began to write. Madame Clerambault on one occasion wanted to come in and asked what he was doing, with a sort of distrust. One would have said that an intuition, very rare on the part of that good woman, who never guessed anything, inspired in her an obscure fear of what her husband was preparing. He succeeded in defending his retreat until he had finished. Ordinarily, he inflicted everything he wrote upon his family : that was a pleasure of innocent, of affectionate vanity : it was also a duty of love, which he could not dispense with, any more than they. This time he dispensed with it, and avoided admitting to himself what were his reasons. Although he was far from foreseeing the consequences of his act, he was afraid of objections : and he was not sure enough of himself to expose himself to them : he wanted to confront the others with the accomplished fact.

His first cry was to accuse himself :

“ FORGIVE US, YE DEAD ! ”

This public confession bore in epigraph the musical phrase of an old lamentation of David, weeping over the body of his son Absalom.

“ Oh ! Absalom my son, my son ! ”

*I had a son. I loved him. I killed him. Fathers of Europe in mourning, it is not for myself alone that I speak, it is for you, millions of fathers, fathers bereaved of your sons, enemies or friends, all covered with their blood like me. It is you all who speak, by the voice of one of yours, my miserable voice which suffers and repents.*

*My son has been killed. For yours ? By yours ? (I do not know.) Like yours. Like you, I have accused the enemy. I have accused the war. But I see the principal culprit to-day. I accuse him. The principal culprit is myself. The principal culprits are ourselves. We are all guilty, but I force you to hear that which you know well, but which you do not wish to know !*

*My son was twenty years of age, when he fell, in battle. For twenty years I cherished him, protected him against hunger, and cold, against illnesses, against darkness of the mind, ignorance, error, and against all the snares disguised in the shadow of life. But what did I do to protect him against the plague which was coming ?*

*I was not, however, one of those who covenanted with the passions of national jealousies, I loved men. I had joy in picturing their future fraternity. Why then did I do nothing against that which menaced it, against the fever which was hatching, against the lying peace, which with a smile on its lips, was preparing to kill ?*

*Fear of offending people, perhaps? Fear of enmities? I loved too well to love, above all to be loved. I was afraid of compromising the acquired good-will, that fragile and insipid agreement with those who surround us, this comedy which one plays to others and to oneself, and of which one is not a dupe, since on both sides one fears to say the word which would tear off the plaster and make bare the cracked house. Fear of seeing clearly in oneself. Interior equivocation. . . . The wish to husband all, to make to hold together the old instincts and the new faith, the forces which destroy each other and annul each other mutually. Country, Humanity, War, and Peace. . . . Not to know exactly on which side one leans. To lean from the one to the other like as when balancing. Fear of the effort to be made, of making a decision, and making a choice. . . . Laziness and cowardice! The whole well replastered with a complaisant faith in the goodness of things, which we thought would know how to organise themselves of themselves. And we were content to look on, to glorify the unimpeachable course of Destiny. . . . Courtiers of Brute Force! . . .*

*In default of our choosing, things—or men (other men)—have chosen. And we have understood then that we had been deceived. But it was so terrible to acknowledge it, and we had grown so unaccustomed to being genuine that we have acted as if we were in agreement with the crime. As a token of our agreement, we have delivered up our sons. . . .*

*Ah! we love them well! Surely more than our lives . . . (if it had only been a matter of giving our lives . . .) but not more than our pride, and so we lowered ourselves to*

veil our moral confusion, the void of our mind, and the darkness of our heart.

We will say nothing of those who believe in the old idol, morose, envious, sticky with clotted blood—the barbarous Country! These latter, in sacrificing their own and others to the idol, kill; but at least they do not know what they do!—But as for those who no longer believe, who only wish to believe (So it is with me! So it is with us!), in sacrificing their sons they offer them to a lie (to affirm while doubting is to lie); they offer them up to prove their lie to themselves. And now that our loved ones are dead for our lie, so far from admitting it, we sink ourselves down in it above the eyes, in order that we may not see it any more. And it is necessary that, after ours, others, all the others, die for our lie! . . .

But as for myself, I cannot do it longer! I think of the sons still living. Will it do me good should evil befall others? Am I a barbarian of the time of Homer to believe that I will appease the grief for my dead son, and his hunger for the light, by spilling on the ground which devours him the blood of other sons? Are we still at that stage? No, each new murder kills my son once again, causes to weigh on his bones the heavy mud of the crime. My son was the future. If I wish to save him, I must save the future, I must spare the fathers who are to come the grief that I experience. Help! Assist me! Reject that lie! Is it for us that those combats between States are waged, this brigandage of the universe? What have we need of? The first of the joys, the first of the laws, is it

*not that man should ascend like a tree, perpendicularly, and extend himself over the circle of the earth which is according to his measure, and by his free strength and his calm labour see his multiple life, in himself and in his sons, patiently accomplished? And who then among us, brothers of the world, is jealous of the others on account of this just happiness, and would wish to steal it from them? What have we to do with the ambitions, the rivalries, the cupidities, the diseases of mind, which blasphemers conceal with the name of our Country? Our Country is you, fathers. Our Country is our sons. All our sons. Let us save them!*

WITHOUT consulting anyone, he went to take those pages as yet hardly dry, to a petty socialist editor in the neighbourhood. He returned relieved. He thought :

“ Now I have spoken. That does not trouble me any more.”

But during the night which followed, he perceived suddenly, by a sudden stab, that it troubled him more than ever. He awoke. . . .

“ What have I done ? ”

He experienced a pained feeling of modesty, in laying bare before the public his sacred grief. And although not thinking that he would cause anger, he had the feeling that there would be want of understanding, and coarse comments, which are profanations.

The following days passed. They produced nothing. Silence. The appeal had been immersed in public inattention. The editor was little known, the publishing of the pamphlet carelessly done. There is not a worse deafness than the wish not to hear. The few readers who had been attracted by the name of Clerambault had after the first lines turned away from this importune article. They thought :

“ Poor man ! His grief is deranging his brain.”

A good pretext for not risking compromising the equilibrium of theirs.



A second article followed. Clerambault in it took leave of the old bloody fetish called Country. Or rather, he opposed the great carnivorous beast to which the poor men of to-day give themselves up as food, the Roman She-wolf, the august Mother of all that which breathes, the universal Country.

TO HER WHO HAS BEEN LOVED

*No grief more bitter than to separate oneself from the one whom one has loved. In tearing her away from my heart, it is my heart that I tear away. The dear, the good, the beautiful—if only one had the blind privilege of those passionate lovers who are able to forget all, all the love, all the beautiful and the good of other days, and then not see anything but the evil which it does them to-day, and what the loved one has become. But I cannot, I cannot forget! I will see thee always as I have loved thee, when I believed in thee, when thou wert my guide and my best friend—Homeland! why hast thou left me? Why hast thou betrayed us? Still, if I were suffering alone, I would conceal the sad discovery under my past love. But I see thy victims, these peoples, these young men, credulous and in love (I recognise in them what I was also). . . . How thou hast deceived us! Thy voice seemed to us to be that of fraternal love; thou calledst us to thee in order to unite us; no more isolated ones! All brothers! To each one thou lentest the power of thousands of others; thou causedst us to love our sky, our earth, and the work of our hands; and we loved one another in loving thee. . . . Whither hast thou led us?*

*Thy object, in inviting us, was it only to make us more numerous, to hate and to kill? Ah! we had enough of our isolated hates. Each one had his load of bad thoughts! However, in giving way to them, we knew them to be bad. But thou, thou namest them sacred, corrupter of souls. . . .*

*Why these combats? For our liberty? Thou makest slaves of us. For our conscience? Thou outragest it. For our happiness? Thou destroyest it. For our prosperity? Our land is ruined. . . . And what need have we of new conquests when the country of our fathers has become too large? Is it for the greed of a few devourers? Is it the mission of the Country to fill these bellies with public misfortune?*

*Country sold to the rich, to the traffickers in the souls and bodies of the nations. Country which is their accomplice and their associate, which conceals their villainies by thy heroic gesture—take care! Behold the hour when the peoples shake off their vermin, their gods, their masters who deceive them! May they punish the guilty ones. As for me, I go straight to the Master, whose shadow covers all. Thou, who sittest on a throne unmoved, while multitudes slaughter one another in thy name, thou whom they all adore, whilst hating one another, thou, who revellest in kindling the bloody rut of the peoples, she-animal, god of prey, false Christ who hoverest above the slaughter, with thy crossed wings and thy hawk-like talons! Who will tear you down from our sky? Who will restore to us the sun and the love of our brothers? I am alone, and I have only my voice, which a breath is going to extinguish. But before disappearing, I cry: "Thou shalt fall!"*

*Tyrant, thou shalt fall ! Humanity wants to live. The time will come when man will break thy yoke of death and of lies. The time comes. The time is now."*

#### REPLY OF THE LOVED ONE

*Thy speech, my son, is the stone that a child throws at the sky. It does not touch me. It is on thyself that it falls back. That which thou insultest, which usurpest my name, is the idol which thou hast sculptured. It is in thy image, and not in mine. The true Country is that of the Father. It is common to all. It embraces you all. It is not its fault, if you shorten it to your stature. . . . Unhappy men ! You soil all your gods ; there is not a great idea that you do not debase. The good that one wishes to do you, you turn into poison. The light that is poured forth on you, you avail yourself of to burn yourself with. I have come among you, to give warmth again to your solitude. I have brought together your shivering souls in herds. I have made of your dispersed weaknesses a union. I am love fraternal, the great Communion. And it is in my name, oh fools, that you destroy yourselves ! . . .*

*I have laboured, for centuries, to deliver you from the chains of bestiality. I try to make you come out of your hard egoism. On the road of Time, you advance laboriously. The provinces, the nations, are the milestones which mark your out-of-breath halting-places. It is your weakness which alone has fixed them. To lead you further, I wait till you have recovered your breath. But you are so poor in breath and in heart that of your impotence you make*

*a virtue ; you admire your heroes, for the limits at which they have been obliged to stop, exhausted, and not because of the first things that they succeeded in attaining to ! Having reached the point where these forerunner heroes have fallen, you believe that you are heroes in your turn ! . . . What have I to do to-day with those shadows of the past ? The heroism that I have need of is not longer that of the Bayards, of the Joan of Arcs, knights and martyrs in a cause now left behind, but of apostles of the future, of great hearts which sacrifice themselves for a larger Country, for a higher ideal. March ! Clear the frontiers ! Since you must have crutches on account of your weakness, carry them back further, to the gates of the Occident, to the ends of Europe, until step by step you reach the limit, and the round of men makes the circuit of the globe, each holding the other's hand.*

*Miserable writer, who talkest to me of outrages, fall back on thyself and dare to examine thyself ! I have given you the power to speak to guide the men of thy people ; thou hast used it to deceive thyself and to lead them astray ; thou hast pushed down in their error those that thou oughtest to have saved, thou hast had the mean courage to sacrifice to thy lie him whom thou loved : thy son. Now, poor ruin, wilt thou dare at least to make a show of thyself before others and say : " This is my work, do not imitate it ! " Go, and may thy misfortune be able to save those who will come after from a similar fate ! Dare to speak ! Cry to them : " Peoples, you are fools. You kill your Country, while thinking you defend it. Your Country is you. Your enemies are your brothers. Embrace one another, ye millions of creatures ! "*

THE same silence seemed to swallow this new cry. Clerambault lived outside the populous centres, where he would not have lacked the warm sympathy of hearts simple and wholesome. He perceived nothing of any echo awakened by his thought.

But although he appeared to be alone, he knew that he was not so. Two extreme feelings which appeared contrary—his modesty and his faith—united to say to him : “That which you think, others think. Thy truth is too great, and thou art too small, for it to exist in thee alone. That which thou hast been able to see with thy poor eyes, other eyes receive, like thee, the light of. At this moment the Great Bear dips towards the horizon. Thousands of eyes gaze at it perhaps. Thou dost not see those eyes. But the far-away glow joins them to thy eyes.”

The solitude of the mind is only an illusion. Grievously painful, but without profound reality. We all belong, even the most independent of us, to a moral family. This community of minds is not grouped in a country, or in a time. Its elements are dispersed among the peoples and among the centuries. For a conservative, they are in the past.

The revolutionaries and the persecuted find them in the future. The future and the past are not less real than the immediate present, which is bounded by a wall beyond which the satisfied eyes of the herd cannot see. And the present, itself, is not such as the arbitrary divisions of States, of nations and of religions would like to make out. Humanity at the present day is a bazaar of thoughts ; without their having been selected, they have put into a heap, which enclosures hastily constructed divide ; thus brothers are separated from brothers, and penned up with strangers. Each State contains different races, which are by no means adapted to think and act together ; each of the families or of the families morally related that are called Countries, comprises minds which, as a matter of fact, belong to different families—of the present, of the past, or of the future. Not being able to absorb them, it oppresses them ; they only escape destruction by subterfuges—apparent submission, interior rebellion—or by flight—voluntary exiles. *Heimatlos*. To reproach them for being unruly to the Country, is to reproach the Irish, the Poles, for escaping being absorbed by England or by Prussia. Here and there these men remain faithful to the true Country. O you who pretend that the war has for purpose to give to each people the right to dispose of itself, when will you give this right to the scattered Republic of the free souls of the entire world ?

This Republic, Clerambault, detached, knew had an existence. Like the Rome of Sertorius, it was all in himself. All in each of them—the ones unknown to the others—for whom it is the Country.

SUDDENLY, the wall of silence which blocked up the utterance of Clerambault fell. And it was not the voice of a brother which replied to his. Where the force of sympathy would have been too feeble to break the barriers, indecency and hatred blindly made a breach.

After several weeks, Clerambault believed he was forgotten and was thinking of a new publication, when one morning Leo Camus burst noisily into his house. He was shrivelled up with anger. With a tragic face he held out to Clerambault an open paper !

“ Read ! ”

And standing behind him while Clerambault read :

“ What filth is this ? ”

Clerambault, astounded, saw himself stabbed by a hand believed to be friendly. A well-known writer, on good terms with him, a colleague of Perrotin, a sedate, honourable man, had, without hesitation, assumed the rôle of public denunciator. Although he had known Clerambault for a long enough time, to have no doubt about the purity of his intentions, he represented him in a dishonourable light.



An historian, accustomed to manipulate texts, he detached from the pamphlets of Clerambault a few truncated phrases, and flourished them, as an act of treason. His virtuous indignation would not have been satisfied with a private letter ; it had chosen the most noisy newspaper, a low laboratory of blackmail which a million Frenchmen despised, but who swallowed its lies with open mouth.

"That is not possible !" stammered Clerambault, whom this unexpected animosity found without defence.

"Not a moment to lose !" said Camus, "you must reply."

"Reply? What can I reply?"

"First of all, naturally, to deny this ignoble invention."

"But it is not an invention, said Clerambault, raising his head and looking at Camus."

It was the turn of Camus to be thunderstruck.

"It is not . . . ? It is not . . . ?" he stuttered with a shock.

"The brochure was written by me," said Clerambault ; "but the meaning of it is distorted in this article." . . .

Camus had not waited for the end of the sentence to shout :

"Thou hast written that, thou, thou ! . . ."

Clerambault, trying to calm his brother-in-law, besought him not to judge before knowing exactly.

But Camus behaved to him like a lunatic and cried :

" I do not trouble myself about that. Yes or no, have you written against the war, against the country ? "

" I have written that the war is a crime, and that all the countries are defiled by it. . . . "

Camus bounded, without permitting Clerambault to explain more, made a motion as if to grip him by the collar, and, controlling himself, hissed in his face that he was a criminal and that he deserved to be court-martialled straightway.

At the uproar caused by his voice, the servant listened at the door. Madame Clerambault hastened to try to appease her brother, with a flood of words spoken in a shrill voice. Clerambault, deafened, offered vainly to read to Camus the impeached pamphlet but Camus refused with fury, saying that it was enough for him to know what the papers had exposed of this filth (he called the newspapers liars ; but he confirmed their lies). And, posing as a judge, he called upon Clerambault to write at once, before him, a letter of public retraction. Clerambault shrugged his shoulders ; he said that he had no accounts to render except to his conscience—that he was free. . . .

" No ! " cried Camus.

" What ! I am not free. I have not the right to say what I think ? "

"No, you are not free ! No, you have not the right," cried Camus, exasperated. "You depend on the country. And, first of all, on the family. It should have the right to get you imprisoned."

He required that the letter should be written, at once. Clerambault turned his back on him. Camus went away, banging the doors, crying that he would never return here ; between them, all was finished.

Afterwards, Clerambault had to submit to questions put by his wife, who, without knowing what he had done, lamented his imprudence, and asked him " why he did not remain silent ? Had they not had enough of unhappiness ? What was this itching to speak ? And what madness to wish to speak differently to the others ? "

Rosine returned from a walk. Clerambault took her to witness ; he recounted to her confusedly the painful scene which had just taken place, and asked her to sit near his table, so that he might read the article to her. Without taking time to take off her gloves and her hat, Rosine seated herself near her father, listened soberly, gracefully, and when he had finished, kissed him and said :

" Yes, it is fine ! . . . But, papa, why have you done that ? "

Clerambault was nonplussed.

" How ? How ? . . . Why have I done it ? Is it not right ? "

" I do not know. . . . Yes. I believe. . . . It

must be right, since you say it. . . . But perhaps it was not necessary to write it. . . .”

“Not necessary? If it is right, it is necessary.”

“But then it causes a noise!”

“But that is not a reason!”

“What good does it do to cause a noise?”

“Now, then, my little girl, what I have written, you think also?”

“Yes, papa, I believe it. . . .”

“Now then, now then, you believe it? . . . You detest the war like me, you would like to see it finished; all that I have said there, I have said to you; and you think like me.”

“Yes, papa.”

*She had put her arms round his neck.*

“But there is no need to write everything. . . .”

Clerambault, grieved, tried to explain what seemed evident to him. Rosine listened, and replied calmly; but it was plain that she did not understand. At the finish she kissed her father again and said:

“As for me, I have told you what I believe. But you know better than I. It is not for me to judge. . . .”

She returned to her room, smiling to her father; and she did not suspect that she had withdrawn from him his staunchest support.

THE insulting attack did not remain isolated. Once the bell was attached it did not cease to ring. But in the general tumult, its sound would have been lost, without the rancour of a voice, which grouped against Clerambault all the choir of diffuse malignities.

That was one of his oldest friends, the writer Octave Bertin. They had been friends at the Lycée Henry IV. The little Parisian Bertin, refined, elegant and precocious, had received graciously the awkward and enthusiastic advances of this great boy who came from his province, who was as ungainly in body as in mind, with arms and legs too long for his clothes, a mixture of candour, of innocent ignorance, of bad taste, of emphasis, of overflowing vigour, of original sallies, of arresting imagery. Nothing had escaped the malicious and precise eyes of young Bertin, neither the ridiculousnesses nor the interior richnesses of Clerambault. Taking everything into account, he had agreed to be friends with him. The admiration which Clerambault shewed for him had not been without influence in the decision. For several years they shared the loquacious superabundance of their juvenile thoughts.

Both dreamed of being artists, read their writings to one another, battled together in interminable discussions. Bertin had always the last word—as he excelled in everything. Clerambault never dreamt of contesting his superiority ; on the contrary he would have knocked down anyone who would have denied it.

He admired open mouthed the virtuosity of thought and of style of this brilliant boy, who attained with ease all the university successes, and whom his masters saw in advance called to the highest destinies—that is to say : official and academic. Bertin understood it well also. He was eager to succeed, and thought that the fruit of glory is better when it is eaten with teeth twenty years old. He had hardly left the school when he managed to publish in a big Parisian review a series of essays which brought him an immediate notoriety. Without taking breath, he produced, one after the other, a novel after the style of Annunzio, a comedy after the style of Rostand, a book on Love, another on the Reform of the Constitution, an inquiry on Modernism, a monograph on Sarah Bernhardt, and lastly *Dialogues of the Living*, the sarcastic and wisely proportioned genius of which procured for him the Parisian chronicle in one of the leading journals of the boulevard. After which, having entered journalism, he remained there. He was one of the ornaments of the world of letters in Paris, when the name

of Clerambault was still unknown. Clerambault, slowly, took possession of his interior world ; he had enough to do to battle against himself, without consecrating much time to the conquest of the public. Therefore, his first books, painfully published, did not go beyond a circle of ten readers. It is necessary to render this justice to Bertin—to say that he was one of the ten, and that he appreciated the talent of Clerambault. He even said so, on occasion ; and so long as Clerambault was unknown, he went out of his way to defend him—not without adding to the eulogiums some friendly and protective counsels, which Clerambault did not always follow, but which he always listened to with the same affectionate respect.

Since then, Clerambault had become known. Since then he had become famous. Bertin, much astonished, sincerely satisfied at the success of his friend, a little annoyed at the same time, let it be understood that he thought that it was exaggerated, and that the better Clerambault was the unknown Clerambault—before he became famous. He undertook, sometimes, to point it out to Clerambault, who neither said yes nor no, for he knew nothing about it, and hardly troubled himself about it ; he had always a new work in his head. The two old school friends had remained on excellent terms ; but they had allowed their relations to become, little by little, wider apart.

The war had made of Bertin a uniformed madman. Formerly, at college, he scandalised the provincial Clerambault by his brazen-faced disrespect for all the values, political or social; country, morals, religion. In his literary works he had continued to parade his anarchism, though in a sceptical form—worldly-wise and full of boredom, which responded to the taste of his rich clientele. With that clientele and all the army contractors, his confrères of the press and of the theatres of the boulevard, these grand-nephews of Parny and of Crebillon, *junior*, he suddenly set himself up like a Brutus sacrificing his sons. His excuse, however, was that he had no sons. But perhaps he regretted it.

Clerambault had nothing to reproach him with; and, therefore, he did not dream of doing so. But he dreamed still less that his old friend, the non-moralist, would constitute himself the attorney against him on behalf of the outraged country. Was it only on account of the country? The furious diatribe that Bertin hurled against Clerambault revealed, it appeared, a personal animosity, which Clerambault could not explain. In the confusion of minds, it might have been comprehensible that Bertin might be shocked by the thought of Clerambault and explain it to him, freely, as one man to another.—But, without warning him, he began by a public execution. On the front page of his paper, he seized hold of him, with an unheard of violence. He



attacked not only his ideas, but his character. He turned Clerambault's tragic crisis of conscience into an attack of literary megalomania, for which he alleged a disproportionate success was responsible. One would have thought that he had tried to find terms the most wounding for Clerambault's pride. He finished in a tone of outrageous superiority, in calling upon him to retract his errors.

The virulence of the article and the notoriety of the writer made of the "Clerambault case" a Parisian event. It engaged the press for almost a week, which was much for these people with the brains of birds. Almost no one sought to read the pages of Clerambault. This was not necessary; Bertin had read them. The confraternity is not accustomed to doing again a superfluous work. It was not a question of reading. It was a question of judging. A curious "Sacred Union" was accomplished on the back of Clerambault. Clericals and Jacobins were agreed upon his execution. Day after day, without transition, the man admired yesterday was dragged in the mud. The national poet became a public enemy. All the Myrmidons of the press directed their heroic invective against him. The greater number shewed, with their constitutional bad faith, an unlikely ignorance. Very few knew the works of Clerambault, they hardly knew his name or the title of one of his volumes; but it did not trouble them any more to disparage

him now than it had troubled them to praise him a short time ago, when the vogue was for him. Now they found in everything that he had written traces of "pro-Germanism." Their citations were, besides, regularly inexact. One of them, in the fury of his indictment, ascribed to Clerambault the work of another, who, turning pale with fear, protested immediately with indignation, in repudiating his dangerous confrère. Friends, uneasy on account of their intimacy with Clerambault, did not wait until someone mentioned it to them; they were first in the field; they addressed "Open Letters" to him which the papers published in a conspicuous place. Some, like Bertin, joined to their public blame an emphatic adjuration to make his *mea culpa*. Others, without having recourse to these circumspections, parted company with him in bitter and insulting terms. So much animosity upset Clerambault. It could not have been caused by these articles alone; it was bound to have been hatching in the hearts of these men. What! So much hidden hate! . . . What could he have done to them? . . . The artist who has attained success does not suspect that, among the smiles of the escort, more than one hides the teeth which await the hour to bite.

Clerambault endeavoured to conceal from his wife the insults of the newspapers. Like a school-boy who juggles away his bad marks, he awaited the hour of the mail so as to hide the spiteful sheets.

But their venom ended by infecting the very air that one breathed. Madame Clerambault and Rosine, in their relations, had to submit to offensive allusions, petty affronts, insults. With the instinct of justice which characterises the human animal, and especially the female animal, they were held to be responsible for the thoughts of Clerambault, which thoughts they hardly knew, and which they did not approve of. (Those who incriminated them did not know them any better.) The more polite resorted to reticencies ; they avoided ostensibly asking news of Clerambault, and of pronouncing the name of Clerambault. . . . "Do not talk of rope in the house of one who has been hung !" This calculated silence was more insulting than a reproach. One would have thought that Clerambault had committed a villainy or else an outrage on decency. Madame Clerambault returned embittered. Rosine pretended that she did not care ; but Clerambault saw that she suffered. A friend, whom they met in the street, went to the other side, and turned her head, so as not to greet them. Rosine was excluded from a charity Committee, where she had worked assiduously for several years.

In this patriotic reprobation, the women distinguished themselves by their rancour. The appeal for reconciliation and pardon did not find more enraged adversaries. It has been the same everywhere. The tyranny of public opinion, that

machine of oppression, constructed by the modern State, and more despotic than the State itself, has not had in time of war instruments more ferocious than certain women. Bertrand Russell cites the case of a poor man, a conductor on a tramway, married, the father of a family, and honourably discharged from the army, who committed suicide in despair, as a result of the insults with which the women of Middlesex pursued him. In all countries hundreds of unfortunates have been, like him, rounded up, distracted and delivered to the slaughter, by those Bacchantes of war. . . . Let us not be surprised at this. If we have not foreseen this madness, it is because we have lived (as Clerambault had lived before that time) on opinions accepted as true, and on undisturbed idealisations. In spite of the efforts of woman to resemble the lying ideal imagined by man for his satisfaction and his tranquillity, woman, enervated, pruned, and raked off as she is to-day, is much more close than man to the savage earth. She is at the fountain-head of the instincts, and is more richly provided with forces, which are neither moral nor immoral, but purely animal. If love is her principal function, it is not love ennobled by reason, it is the love of the brute state blind and delirious, where egoism and sacrifice are mingled, equally unconscious, and both at the service of the obscure ends of the species. All the tender and flowery endeavours to cloak those forces

which frighten them are a trellis-work of tropical creepers above a torrent. Their object is to deceive. Man could not endure life, if his sickly soul saw in front the great forces which carry it away. His ingenious cowardice exerts itself to adapt them mentally to his weakness ; he lies about love, he lies about hate, he lies about his wife, he lies about his Country, he lies about his gods ; he is so afraid that the manifest reality may make him fall down in convulsions, that he has substituted for himself the insipid picture of his idealism.

The war caused the fragile rampart to collapse. Clerambault saw the cloak of feline politeness with which civilisation clothes itself fall ; and the cruel beast appeared.

Among the old friends of Clerambault the most tolerant were those who belonged to the political world ; deputies, ministers of yesterday or of to-morrow ; accustomed to handling the human herd, they knew how much it is worth ! The audacities of Clerambault seemed to them to be very ingenuous. They thought as he did twenty times more strongly ; but they deemed it foolish to say so, dangerous to put it into writing, and more dangerous still to reply to it ; for that which one attacks, one reveals ; and one emphasises the importance of that which one condemns. Also, their judgment would have been to remain discreetly silent as regards those untoward writings,

which the public conscience, somnolent and fondered, might have itself neglected. That had been, during the war, the watchword generally observed in Germany, where the public authorities stifled secretly the rebel writers, when they could not choke them without noise. But the political spirit of the French democracy is more outspoken and yet more limited. It does not know what silence means. So far from hiding its hatreds, it treads the boards to spite them out. French liberty is like that of rude ; with open jaw it shouts. Anyone who does not agree with it, is a traitor forthwith ; it finds always some low journalist to say at what price this free voice was bought ; and twenty demoniacs stir up against it the fury of the mimes. Once the noise has begun, there is nothing to do but to wait till the violence exhausts itself by its excess. In the meantime, look out for yourself ! The prudent take shelter, or cry with the wolves.

The director of the newspaper, who prided himself on publishing for several years the poems of Clerambault, told him that he deemed all this hubbub to be ridiculous, that it was only a trifle, but that, to his great regret, he was obliged, on account of his subscribers, to cut him out. . . . Oh ! with all the forms ! . . . Without rancour, of course ? . . . In fact, nothing churlish ; the only thing they did was to make him ridiculous. And as for

Perrotin—(piteous human race !)—he, in an interview, mocked Clerambault in a brilliant manner, causing laughter at his expense, and secretly thought he might remain his friend.

In his own house, Clerambault no longer found any support. His old companion, who, for thirty years, thought only through him, repeating his thoughts before even understanding them, was frightened and shocked at his new utterances and reproached him sharply for the scandal created, for the injury done to his name, to the name of his family, to the memory of their dead son, to sacred vengeance, to his Country. With regard to Rosine, she loved him always ; but she did not understand him any more. A woman has rarely the exigencies of the mind ; she has only those of the heart. It was enough for her that her father did not associate himself with words of hate, that he remained pitiful and good. She did not desire that he should translate his sentiments into theories, and above all that he should publish them. She had the practical and affectionate good sense of her who preserves her heart and accommodates herself to it as well. She did not understand that inflexible necessity of logic, which urges man to explain the extreme consequences of his faith. She did not understand it. Her hour had passed, the hour in which she had received and discharged, without knowing it, the mission of maternally lifting up her father, feeble,

uncertain, broken, of sheltering him under her wing, of rescuing his conscience, of restoring to him the torch that he had let fall. Now that he had got it back, her rôle had been accomplished. She had become again the "little girl," loving, effaced, who looks at the great doings of the world with eyes a little indifferent, and in the depths of her soul, treasures religiously the phosphorescence of the supernatural hour which she has lived, and which she does not understand.



ABOUT the same time, Clerambault received a visit from a young soldier on leave, a friend of the family. An engineer, the son of an engineer, Daniel Favre, whose quick intelligence was not limited by his handicraft, had been for a long time charmed by Clerambault ; the powerful flights of modern science have in a remarkable manner brought his sphere close to that of poetry ; it has become the greatest of poems.

Daniel was an enthusiastic reader of Clerambault ; they had exchanged affectionate letters ; and the young man, whose family was friendly with the Clerambaults, often visited them, perhaps not only for the satisfaction of meeting the poet. The visits of this friendly lad, aged about thirty years, big, well-set, with strong features, a shy smile, and very clear eyes set in a tanned face, were well received ; and Clerambault was not alone in finding pleasure in them. It would have been easy for Daniel to have secured a post at the rear in a foundry ; but he had demanded that he should not leave his perilous post at the front ; he had rapidly attained to the rank of lieutenant. He availed himself of his leave to come and see Clerambault.

Clerambault was alone. His wife and daughter had gone out. He received his young friend with joy. But Daniel appeared troubled ; and after having replied indifferently to the questions of Clerambault, he introduced suddenly the subject he had set his heart on. He said he had heard at the front of the articles of Clerambault ; and he was disturbed. One said . . . one affirmed. . . . At last, one was censorious. . . . He knew that it was unjust. But he came—(and he took the hand of Clerambault with a warm shyness)—he came to beseech him not to separate himself from those whom he loved. He recalled the devotion which inspired the poet who had extolled the French land and the deep grandeur of the race . . . “ Remain, remain with us, in the hour of trial ! ”

“ I have never been more with you,” replied Clerambault. And he asked :

“ Dear friend, you say that people have attacked what I have written. As for you yourself, what do you think of it ? ”

“ I have not read it,” said Daniel. “ I have not wished to read it. I was afraid of being cast down in my affection for you, or disturbed in the accomplishment of my duty.”

“ You have not much confidence in yourself, to be afraid of shaking your convictions by the reading of a few lines.”

“ I am sure of my convictions,” said Daniel, a

little piqued ; “ but there are certain subjects which it is preferable not to discuss.”

“ That,” said Clerambault, “ is a speech that I did not expect from a man of science ! Has the truth something to lose by being discussed ? ”

“ The truth, no. But love. Love of country.”

“ My dear Daniel, you are more foolhardy than I. I do not oppose the truth to the love of country, I try to make them agree.”

Daniel cut in :

“ One does not argue about the country.”

“ It is, then,” said Clerambault, “ an article of faith ? ”

“ I do not believe in religions, protested Daniel. I do not believe in any. It is precisely for that. What would remain on the earth, if there was no country ? ”

“ I think there are on earth many beautiful and good things. The country is one. I also love it. I do not question love, but the manner of loving.”

“ There is only one way,” said Daniel.

“ And that is ? ”

“ To obey.”

“ Love with the eyes closed. Yes, the ancient symbol. I would like to open them.”

“ No, let us alone, let us alone ! The task is already difficult enough. Do not attempt to make it more cruel for us ! ”

In a few sober, desultory, quivering phrases,

Daniel conjured up the terrible pictures of the weeks that he had just lived in the trenches, the disgust and the horror at that which he had suffered, had seen being suffered, and had caused to suffer.

"But, my dear boy," said Clerambault, "since you see this ignominy, why do you not try to prevent it?"

"Because that is impossible."

"To know that, you must first try."

"The law of nature is the struggle between creatures. Destroy or be destroyed. It is so, it is so."

"And that will never change?"

"No," said Daniel, with an accent of obstinate sadness. "It is the law."

There are some men of science, from whom science hides so well the reality which it contains, that they no longer see under the net the reality which escapes. They embrace all the field which science has discovered, but would judge it impossible and even ridiculous to enlarge it beyond the limits which reason has marked out. They only believe in a progress which is confined to the interior of the enclosure. Clerambault knew too well the mocking smile with which eminent scientists, the products of the official schools, turn aside, without other examination, the suggestions of inventors. A certain form of science is perfectly allied to docility. However, Daniel did not bring to his any irony; it was

rather the expression of a stoical and heaped-up sadness. He did not lack boldness of spirit. But in abstract things. Face to face with life, he was a mixture—or more exactly a succession—of timidity and stiffness, of modesty which doubts and of sternness of conviction. A man—like many men—complex, contradictory, made of pieces, and of fragments. Only, with an intellectual, especially with a man of genius, the pieces are in juxtaposition, and one sees the seams.

“However,” said Clerambault, speaking out aloud what he had just thought out in silence, “the data of science itself are changed. The conceptions of chemistry, of physics, have undergone during twenty years a course of regeneration, which overthrows them in fertilising them. And the supposed laws which regulate human society, or rather the chronic brigandage of the nations, cannot be changed! Is there not room in your mind for the hope of a better future?”

“We would not be able to fight,” said Daniel, “if we did not hope to establish a more just and humane order. Many of my companions hope by this war to put an end to war. I have not that confidence, and I do not ask so much. But I know with certainty that our France is in danger, and that if she were defeated, her defeat would be that of humanity.”

“The defeat of each people is that of humanity,

for all are necessary. The union of all the peoples would be the only real victory. Any other ruins the victors as well as the vanquished. Each day that this war continues sheds the precious blood of France, and it risks remaining exhausted for ever."

Daniel checked these words with an irritated and sad gesture. Yes, he knew it, he knew it. . . . Who knew better than he, that France was dying every day, with its heroic effort, that the élite of the youth, the strength, the intelligence, the vital sap of the race was being poured out in torrents, and with it the riches, the industry, the credit, of the people of France ! . . . France, bled in its four limbs, was following the same route that traversed by Spain four centuries ago—the route which leads to the deserts of Escorial. . . . But let not one speak to him of the possibility of a peace which would put an end to the anguish before the total encrushing of the enemy ! It was not lawful to reply to the advances which Germany was then making—not even to discuss them. It was not lawful even to speak of them. And, like the politicians, the generals, the journalists, and the millions of poor animals who repeat at the top of their voice the lesson that has been taught them, Daniel cried : " To the last."

Clerambault looked with an affectionate pity at this brave boy, timid and heroic, who was frightened at the idea of discussing the dogmas of which he was the victim. Had not his scientific mind revolted

against the nonsense of this bloody game, of which death for France as for Germany—and perhaps more so than for Germany—was the stake?

Yes, he revolted, but he hardened himself not to admit it. Daniel adjured Clerambault again. . . .  
 “Yes, his thoughts were perhaps right, true . . . but not now! They are not opportune. . . . In twenty or thirty years! . . . Let us first of all accomplish our task, and, by the victory of France, we shall found the liberty of the world, and the fraternity of men.”

Ah! poor Daniel! Did he not foresee, that at the very best, that this victory will be defiled with excesses and that it will be the turn of the conquered to take up again the maniacal wish for revenge and just victory? Each nation wishes for the end of wars by its own victory. And from victory to victory, humanity collapses in defeat.

Daniel rose, to go away. Claspings the hands of Clerambault, he recalled with emotion his poems of former times, in which, repeating the heroic language of Beethoven, Clerambault exalted fruitful suffering . . . *Durch Leiden Freude* . . .”

“Alas! alas! How they understand! . . . We sing of suffering, that we may be delivered from it. But they—they fall in love with it! And now our song of deliverance becomes for other men a song of oppression. . . .”

Clerambault did not reply. He loved this dear

boy. These poor people who sacrifice themselves know well that they have nothing to gain from the war. And the greater sacrifices that are demanded of them, the more faith they have. Blessings on them ! . . . If only they did not consent to sacrifice all humanity along with them !



CLERAMBAULT accompanied Daniel to the door of the room, when Rosine returned. On seeing her visitor she made a movement of delighted surprise. Daniel's face brightened up also ; and Clerambault noticed the joyous animation of the two young people. Rosine invited Daniel retrace his steps, to continue the conversation. Daniel looked as if he was going to do so, hesitated, refused to sit down again, and, assuming a constrained expression, he gave a vague pretext which obliged him to leave. Clerambault, reading the heart of his daughter, insisted in a friendly way that he should return at least once before the end of his leave. Daniel, embarrassed, said no, at first, then yes, without making a firm engagement, and finally, when pressed by Clerambault, fixed a day, and went away, in a somewhat cold manner. Clerambault went back to his room and sat down. Rosine remained standing, immobile, absorbed, and with a pained expression. Clerambault smiled to her. She came and kissed him.

The appointed day came, but Daniel did not return. He was awaited the following day and the day after. He had returned to the front. . . . At the

instigation of Clerambault his wife went, a short time after, along with Rosine, to visit the parents of Daniel. They were received with an icy, almost offensive coldness. Madame Clerambault returned, declaring that she would never see those boors again. Rosine had great difficulty in concealing her tears.

During the week that followed, a letter arrived from Daniel, to Clerambault. A little ashamed of his attitude and of that of his parents, he sought less to excuse it than to explain it. He made a discreet allusion to the hope that he had conceived, of becoming, one day, nearer to Clerambault than by the ties of admiration, of respect, and of friendship. But he added that Clerambault had just created trouble in his dreams of the future by the regrettable rôle which he had believed himself obliged to play, in the drama in which the life of the country was playing and by the reverberation which his voice had had. His words, without doubt badly understood, but certainly imprudent, had assumed a sacrilegious character which raised indignation. Among the officers at the front, as among his friends of the rear, the indignation was unanimous. His parents, who knew of the dream of happiness that he had formed, put their veto on it. And whatever pain it might cause him, he did not think he had the right to ignore scruples which had their source in a profound affection for the injured country. Opinion could not conceive that an officer who had the

honour to offer his blood for France would dream of a union which would be interpreted as an adhesion to deadly principles. Opinion would be wrong, without doubt. But one must always consider opinion. The opinion of a people, even when excessive and unjust in appearances, is always respectable ; and it was an error on the part of Clerambault to have attempted to set it at defiance. Daniel pressed Clerambault to recognise this error and to disavow it, to efface by new articles the deplorable impression created by the first. He made it out to be a duty—a duty towards his country—a duty towards himself—and (he let it be understood) a duty towards her who was so dear to both of them. His letter finished by diverse other considerations, in which the word opinion occurred two or three times. It finished by taking the place of reason and even that of conscience.

Clerambault thought smilingly of the scene of Spitteler. The king Epimetheus was a man of firm conscience, and when the hour came to put it to the proof, he could no longer lay his hands on it, saw it running away, pursued it, and to catch it again, threw himself on his belly, and looked for it under the bed. And Clerambault thought that one could be a hero before the fire of the enemy and a very little boy before the opinion of his fellow-countrymen.

He showed the letter to Rosine. Partial though

love may be, she was wounded in her heart by the violence which her friend wished to do to the convictions of her father. She thought that Daniel did not love her enough. And she said that she did not love him enough to accept such exigencies ; even if Clerambault had been disposed to yield, she would not permit it ; for that would be unjust.

Upon which, kissing her father, she affected bravely to laugh and to forget her cruel misfortune. But one never forgets the happiness that one has had a glimpse of, while there remains the smallest chance of finding it again. She thought of it constantly ; and even, after some time, Clerambault noticed that she kept herself at a distance from him. He who has the abnegation to sacrifice himself has rarely that of not harbouring rancour towards the creatures for whom he sacrifices himself. Rosine, in spite of herself, had a grudge against her father on account of her lost happiness.

A CURIOUS phenomenon shewed itself in the mind of Clerambault. He was struck down, and, at the same time, strengthened. He suffered from having spoken, and he felt that he was going to speak again. He did not belong to himself any more. His writing held him, bound him ; his thought was no sooner published than he was tied by it. The work which gushed out from the heart gushed back to the heart. It is born in an hour of exaltation of mind ; this hour it prolongs and reproduces in the mind, which, without it, would have been exhausted. It is the jet of light which comes from the depths ; it is the better part of self, the most eternal ; it drags along the rest of the animal. Man, willy-nilly, goes along, leaning on his works and towed along by them ; they live outside him, and they give him back his lost vigour, recalling to him his duty, guiding him while commanding him.

Clerambault wished to remain silent. And he reiterated.

This time he did not go very far. "Thou tremblest, carcase, for thou knowest where I am going to drag thee," said Turenne to his body before the battle. The carcase of Clerambault did not shew

to better advantage, and although the battle into which he was leading it was a much more humble affair, it was on that account all the harder ; for he found himself alone and without an army. The spectacle which he presented to himself in this " *veillée d'armes* " was humiliating. He saw himself naked, in his mediocrity—a poor man, timid by nature, a little cowardly, depending on others, on their affection, on their approbation ; it was frightfully painful for him to break his ties with them, to go with lowered head to meet their hatred. . . . Would he be strong enough to resist ? And the doubts, which had been dispersed, returned to the assault. Who forced him to speak ? Who would hear him ? What purpose would it serve ? Had he not the example of the wisest people who remained silent ?

Still, however, his resolute brain continued to dictate to him what he ought to write ; and his hand wrote it, without attenuating a word. He was like two men ; the one prostrate, who was afraid and cried : " I do not wish to fight ! "—and the other, who, scornful of convincing the coward, dragged him along by the collar, and said : " Thou shalt go."

It would, nevertheless, do him too much honour to think that he acted thus, through courage. He acted thus because he could not do otherwise. Even if he had wished to stop himself, he was bound to go on, to speak . . . " It is thy mission." He did not

understand, he asked himself why it was precisely he who had been chosen, he, poet of Love, made for a calm life, without struggle, without sacrifices, while other men, vigorous, trained to war, cut out for the combat, having the soul of athletes, remained unemployed. "Useless to argue. Obey. It is so."

Even the duality of his nature constrained him, once that the stronger of the two souls had imposed itself on him, to give himself over to it wholly. A more normal man would have blended the two natures, or rather combined them, would have found a compromise which satisfied the exigencies of the one, and the prudence of the other. But with a Clerambault it is all the one, or all the other. Whether it pleased him or not, once he had chosen it, he went straight ahead. And for the same reasons which lately had made him believe absolutely in that which all the world around him believed, he was bound to shew himself without any circumspection, as soon as he had begun to see the lies which led him astray. Those who had to a lesser extent been the dupes of them, would not have revealed them. And so, what was rash in him urged him in spite of himself, like *Œdipus*, to a struggle with the Sphinx, homeland, which was awaiting him at the crossroads.

THE attack of Bertin drew on Clerambault the attention of several politicians of the Extreme Left, who did not know too well how to conciliate their opposition to the Government (their *raison-d'être*) with the Sacred Union which had been agreed to against the invasion of the enemy. They reproduced the first two articles of Clerambault in one of those socialist journals, whose thought at that time abounded in contradictions. One there fought against the war, while voting credits. Eloquent international affirmations stood side by side with the articles of ministers of a nationalist character. In this game of see-saw, the pages of Clerambault of a vague lyricism, in which the attack was measured, and in which the criticism of the idea of country was enveloped with piety, would have retained the soothing character of a platonic protestation, if the censorship had not nibbled the phrases with the tenacity of white ants. The traces of the teeth exposed to view what the general state of distraction would have allowed to escape.

It was in the same way that, in the article "To her whom we have loved," after having retained the word country when it appeared for the first



time, joined together with an invocation of love, the censorship cut it out from the rest of the piece, where it was the object of less flattering appreciations. Its foolishness did not see that the word, awkwardly concealed by the extinguisher, only shone more brightly in the mind of the reader. Thus, it contributed to give some importance to a writing which had very little importance. It must be added that, in this hour of universal passivity, the smallest utterance about free humanity assumed an extraordinary magnitude, especially when it bore a reputed name. The "Forgiveness asked of the dead," still more than the other article, was, or could be, by its sad accent, contagious to the mass of simple hearts, which the war lacerated. At the first indications that they had of it, the powers that be, up till that time indifferent, endeavoured to cut short its publicity. Sufficiently circumspect not to mark out Clerambault by a measure of harshness, it found means of influencing the paper by means of arrangements made in the place itself.

An opposition to the writer shewed itself, on the part of the newspaper itself. They were not going, naturally, to reproach him on account of the internationalism of his thought ! They accused him of bourgeois sentimentality.

Clerambault had just furnished them with arguments, in a third article, in which his aversion to all violence seemed incidentally to condemn Revolu-

tion as well as War. Poets are always bad politicians.

This was an indignant reply to the "*Appeal to the Dead*" which was shrieked by Barrès, a shivering screech-owl, perched on a cemetery cypress tree.

### APPEAL TO THE LIVING

*Death reigns in the world. You who live, throw off his yoke ! It does not suffice death to annihilate the peoples. It wants them to glorify it, that they may turn to it singing ; and their masters require that they celebrate their own sacrifice. . . . " It is the finest fate, the most worthy of envy ! " . . . They lie ! Long live life ! Life alone is holy. And the love of life is the first virtue. But the men of to-day no longer possess it. This war demonstrates it, and for fifteen years, there has been entertained by many (admit it !) the monstrous hope of this destruction. You do not love life, you who cannot find better employment for it than to throw it in as food for death. Your life is a burden to you ; to you, the rich bourgeois, servants of the past, conservators who sulk, through lack of appetite, through moral dyspepsia, soul and mouth clammy, bitter, through ennui—and to you, proletarians, poor and unhappy, by despondency at the lot which is assigned to you. In the disagreeable mediocrity of your life, in the meagre hope of ever having it transformed (men of little faith !), you do not aspire to get out of it but by an act of violence, which raises you above the morass, for the space of a minute or less—the last. The strongest, those of you who*

*have best preserved the primitive instincts—anarchists or revolutionaries—appeal to them alone to accomplish this act which liberates them. But the mass of people are too weary to take the initiative. That is why they welcome with avidity the powerful deep billow which stirs up the countries—war. They abandon themselves to it with a gloomy voluptuousness. It is the only moment of their life in which these vapid beings feel to pass in them the breath of the infinite. And that moment is that of annihilation! . . .*

*Ah! a fine way to employ life! . . . Not to be able to affirm it without denying it—for the profit of what carnivorous god? Country, Revolution . . . which makes his jaws crack on the bones of millions of men. . . .*

*To die, to destroy. Glorious affair! To live is the important thing. And you do not know it! You are not worthy of it. You have never tasted the blessing of the living minute, of the joy which circulates in the light. Moribund souls who wish that all may die with them, invalid brothers to whom we stretch out the hand to save, and who draw us to them, fiercely, into the abyss. . . .*

*But it is not you, unhappy ones, that I have a grudge against; it is your masters. You, the masters of the hour, our intellectual masters, our political masters, masters of gold, of iron, of blood and of thought! You who have hold of those States, you who move those armies, you who have fashioned these generations, by your newspapers, your books, your schools, your churches, and who of those free souls have made herds! All their education—your work of enslavement—lay education, Christian education, exalts*

*equally, with an immoral joy, the nothingness of military glory and of happiness ; it hangs out, at the end of the line of the Church or of the State, death as a bait. . . .*

*Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, curses upon you ! Politicians and priests, artists, writers, chieftains of death, you are full, inside, of dead men's bones and of corruption. Ah ! ye are indeed the sons of those who murdered the Christ. Like them, you overburden the shoulders of men with monstrous loads which you would not touch even with the points of your fingers. Like them, you crucify ; and those who wish to aid the unfortunate peoples, those who come amongst you, carrying in their hands peace, blessed peace, you imprison and outrage, and, as the Scriptures say, you will pursue them from city to city, until all the blood shed on earth falls back in rain on you.*

*Purveyors of death, you do not work except for her. Your countries are only made to enslave the future to the past and to bind the living to the putrefying dead. You condemn the new life to perpetuate timorously the empty rites of the tombs. . . .*

*Let us rise from the dead ! Let us proclaim the Easter of the living !*

*Men, it is not true that you are the slaves of the dead, and, by them, chained like serfs to the soil. Let the dead bury their dead and be buried with them ! You are the sons of the living, and, in your turn, living. Brothers young and strong, break the neurasthenic torpor, which weighs on the souls enslaved to the countries of the past. Be masters of the day, and masters of the past, fathers and sons of your*

*works ! Be free ! Each one of you is Man—not the corrupted flesh which stinks in tombs ; but the crackling fire of life which purifies corruption, which devours the corpses of dead centuries, and always a new fire, a young fire, encircles the earth with its burning arms. Be free ! O conquerors of the Bastille, you have not yet conquered that which is in you, the false Fatality, which all those who, whether slaves or tyrants (they are of the same convict band), have, for centuries, built in order to imprison you, and who are afraid that you might become conscious of your freedom. The massive shadow of the past—religions, races, countries, materialist science—hides your sun. March to its encounter ! Liberty is there, behind these ramparts and these towers of prejudice, of dead laws, of sacred lies, which guard the interests of a few soothsayers, the opinion of the regimented masses, and your own doubts. Dare to resolve ! And suddenly, behind these fallen walls of a false Destiny, you will behold again the sun and the horizon unlimited.*

Instead of being responsive to the revolutionary flame of this appeal, the staff of the newspapers were only interested in three or four lines in which Clerambault seemed to put in the same category violences of all kinds whether for the wrong or the right. What right had this poet, in the Party journal, to give lessons to socialists ? In the name of what doctrine ? Was he even a socialist ?

Send back to the bourgeoisie this Tolstoyan and anarchist bourgeois with his exercises in style !

Vainly, several broader minds protested that with or without etiquette a free thought ought to be received, and that that of Clerambault, however ignorant might be the doctrine, was more truly socialistic than that of socialists associated with the work of national butchery. They passed on to other things, and the article of Clerambault was, after having remained for several weeks at the bottom of a drawer, returned, with the excuse that the events of the moment were exacting and that there was too much copy.

Clerambault took the article to a small review, which was more attracted by his literary fame than by his ideas. The result was that the review was guillotined, suspended by the decree of the police, the day after the appearance of the article, although it had been made quite harmless. Clerambault was obstinate. There are no worse rebels when they are forced to it, than those who have been submissive all their lives. I remember to have seen, once, a big sheep, which, worried by a dog, finished by rushing at him ; and the dog, overwhelmed by this unexpected upsetting of the laws of nature, ran away barking, from stupor and fear. The State-dog is too sure of his fangs to trouble himself about a few rebel sheep. But the sheep Clerambault took no account of the obstacle ; he butted it at random. The characteristic of feeble and generous hearts is to pass without transition from one exaggeration to

another. From excess of the herd sentiment Clerambault had jumped, at one bound, to excess of detached individualism. Because he knew it well, he only saw around him the plague of submission, this social suggestion, of which the effects were displayed in all his surroundings ; heroic passivity of the armies which is extolled to the point of frenzy, like millions of ants enclosed in the mass of the tribe ; sheepish servility of the assemblies, which, while despising a government leader, support him with their votes, at the risk of an explosion provoked by the revolt of a single individual ; slovenly submission, but unregimented, even of the parties of liberty, sacrificing themselves to the absurd idol of abstract Unity.

This passion for abdicating was for Clerambault the enemy. And his task seemed to him to be in awakening doubt, the spirit which gnaws fetters in order to break, if possible, the great suggestion.

THE seat of the evil was the idea of Nation. One could not touch this envenomed point, without causing the beast to roar. Clerambault attacked it without discretion.

*. . . What have I to do with your nations? You ask me to love, to hate nations? I love, or I hate men. There are in each nation, noble men, vile men, mediocre men. And in each nation, the noble and the vile are few, and the mediocre are many. I love, or I do not love a man for what he is, and not for what the others are. And if there was only one man that I love in a nation, that would be sufficient for me not to condemn it. You talk to me of conflicts and hatreds among races? Races are the colours of the prism of life; it is their union which makes the light. Evil to him who destroys it! I do not belong to one race, I belong to life, to life as a whole. In all nations, be they allies or enemies, I have brothers; and the most close are not always those which you wish to impose on me as compatriots. Families of souls are dispersed throughout the world. Let us reconstruct them! Our task is to destroy chaotic nations, and to weave in their place harmonious groups. Nothing will prevent it. Even persecutions will forge on the common suffering the common affection of the tortured peoples.*



At other times, without denying the idea of nation, and even acknowledging the existence of nations as a natural fact—(for he did pretend to be logical, and sought only to reach the idol, through all the faults of the cuirasse)—he affirmed roughly his detachment from their rivalries. This attitude was not the least dangerous.

*I cannot interest myself in the quarrels about supremacy among your nations. It is indifferent to me as to which colour wins. Whatever may be the victorious party, it is humanity which wins. It is just that the people the most alive, the most intelligent, and the most industrious should win in the peaceful battles of industry. The monstrous thing would be that the competitors ousted, or on the point of being so, should have recourse to violence in order to squeeze the successful competitor out of the market. That would be to sacrifice the interests of all men to those of a commercial character. The Country is not a business enterprise. It is certainly unfortunate that the advance of the ones should mean the decline of the others ; but when the great commerce of my country ruins the petty commerce of my country you do not say that it is a crime of lèse-patrie; yet nevertheless, this battle causes ruins sadder and more unmerited. The whole economic system of the world at the present time is baneful and vicious ; it must be remedied. But war, which aims at swindling the more clever or more fortunate competitors for the benefit of the more clumsy or more lazy, only worsens the vice of the system ; it enriches some, and ruins the community.*

*All peoples are not able, on the same road, to march at the same pace. Some outmarch the others, and are outmarched in their turn. What does it matter, as long as they form the same column ! Let there be no foolish pride ! The pole of energy of the world is constantly being displaced. In the same country it has often changed ; in France it has passed from the Roman Province to the Loire of the Valois ; it is now at Paris, but it will not remain there always. The whole earth obeys an alternate rhythm of fruitful Spring and of Autumn which sleeps. The commercial highways do not remain unchangeable. The riches of the sub-soil are not inexhaustible. A people which has during centuries spent itself without stint proceeds through its glory to its decline ; it will only exist in renouncing the purity of its blood and mixing it with others. It is vain, it is criminal, to attempt to prolong its past maturity in hindering that of the others. Such are our old men of to-day who send the young men to death. That does not make them younger. And they kill the future.*

*Instead of becoming enraged against the laws of life, a healthy people seeks to understand those laws ; it sees its true progress, not in a stupid will which is determined not to become old, but in a constant effort to progress with the age, to become other and greater. To each age its task ! To hold for a lifetime to the same thing, is laziness and weakness. Learn to change ! Change is life ! The factory of humanity has work for all. Peoples, work, all of you, and may each one be proud of the work of all ! The labour, the genius of all the others are ours.*

These articles appeared here and there, when they could, in some little advanced newspaper, anarchist and literary, in which violent attacks on persons took the place of a reasoned battle against the régime. They were almost illegible, being cut up by the censorship. Besides, when the article was reproduced in another newspaper, the censor, shewing a capricious forgetfulness of what he had done, allowed to pass what he had cut out the night before, and cut out what he had then allowed to pass. To disentangle the meaning, it was necessary to apply oneself. The astonishing thing was, that in default of his friends, the adversaries of Clerambault applied themselves. Usually, in Paris, fits of anger do not last long. The worst enemies, trained to the war of the pen, know very well that silence stifles more effectually than insult, and silence their animosity, in order to exercise it more surely. But in the crisis of hysteria which tortured the souls of Europe, there was no longer any compass to guide, even for hatred.

The violence of the attacks of Octave Bertin came frequently to recall Clerambault to the public. In vain he said disdainfully to the others : "Do not speak of him !" He said it at the end of each article in which he had just expressed his anger.

He was too familiar with all the inward weaknesses, with all the faults of mind, and the little

ridiculousnesses of his former friend. He did not resist the pleasure of hitting them with a sure shaft. And Clerambault, cut to the quick, but not wise enough not to shew it, allowed himself to be drawn into the combat, replied, and proved that he too could draw blood. An ardent hatred was let loose between them. The result could be foreseen. Up till then, Clerambault had been inoffensive. He confined himself, in short, to moral dissertations ; his polemics did not go out of the circle of ideas ; they could just as well be applied to Germany, to England—or to ancient Rome—as to France of to-day. To tell the truth, he was ignorant of the political facts with respect to which he declaimed—like nine-tenths of the men of his class and his profession. Also his trumpetings were hardly able to trouble the masters of the day. The noisy passage-at-arms between Clerambault and Bertin, in the midst of the hubbub of the press, had a double consequence ; on the one hand, it accustomed Clerambault to a more exact method in his fencing, it obliged him to take his stand on ground less hollow than that of a war about words ; on the other hand, it put him in touch with men who, better informed as to the facts, furnished him with a documentation. Some time ago there had been formed in France a small society, half-clandestine, of independent research and of free criticism on the war and the causes which had led to it. The State, so

vigilant in crushing all attempt at free thought, had deemed those men, wise, tranquil, men of study before everything else, who did not seek notoriety, and contented themselves with private discussions, to be of no danger ; but had deemed it more politic, in watching them, to enclose them between four walls. It was deceived in its calculations. Truth, modestly, laboriously found, if at first known to only five or six, cannot be rooted out ; it ascends from the earth with an irresistible force. Clerambault learned for the first time, of the existence of those passionate seekers after truth, who recalled those of the time of the Dreyfus affair ; their apostleship, behind closed doors, assumed, in the general oppression, some appearance of a small Christian society of the Catacombs. Thanks to them he discovered, side by side with the injustices, the lies of the "Great War." He had, up till then, a feeble suspicion of them. But he did not suspect to what extent the history which touches us most closely had been falsified. He was shocked by it. Even in his most critical moments, his innocence had never imagined the deceits on which a campaign of Right rests. And, as he was not the man to keep his discovery to himself, he shouted it out in the articles which the censorship prohibited, after that in a satirical, ironical, symbolical form, in little stories and Voltairian apologues. These passed sometimes, by the inattention of the censor, and

shewed Clerambault to the powers that be as a man decidedly dangerous.

Those who thought they knew him were very surprised. He was styled off-hand as a sentimentalist by his enemies. And certainly, he was so. But he knew it, and because he was French he had the faculty of laughing at it, of jeering at it. It was all right for the sentimentalists of Germany to believe in a dull way in themselves ! At the bottom of an eloquent and sensitive Clerambault, the vision of the Gaul—always on the *qui vive*, in the heart of his great woods—observes, loses sight of nothing and is ready to laugh at everything.

The most surprising thing is, that this deep thing emerges, at the moment when one expects it the least, in the hardest trial, at the time of the most pressing danger. The sense of universal ridicule came to act as a tonic to Clerambault. His character, hardly disengaged from the conventions in which it was encased, assumed, suddenly, a living complexity. Good, tender, combative, irritable beyond measure, and knowing it, ironical, sceptical and yet believing, he astonished himself, in seeing himself in the mirror of that which he wrote. All his vigour, prudently, bourgeoisly enclosed within himself, burst forth, developed by moral solitude and the hygiene of action.

And Clerambault perceived that he had not known himself. He was like one reborn, after the

night of anguish. He learned to take a species of joy, of which he had no previous idea—the intoxicating and detached joy of the free man in the battle ; all his senses adjusted like a well-stretched bow, and revelling in this perfect well-being.

BUT those who were round about him did not profit any. Madame Clerambault did not reap anything from the struggle but disagreements, and a general animosity, which finished by showing itself among the petty shopkeepers of the neighbourhood. Rosine drooped. Her heartache, which she kept secret, caused her to pine away in silence. If she did not complain, her mother complained enough for both. She associated in an equal bitterness the fools who insulted her, and the imprudent Clerambault who brought them upon her. There were, at each meal, clumsy reproaches, to cause him to keep quiet. Nothing could do it ; silent or noisy reproaches slid off Clerambault ; without doubt he was contrite ; but he abandoned himself to the ardour of the battle ; an unconscious and somewhat childish egotism caused him to turn aside all that which was opposed to the new pleasure.

Circumstances came to the aid of Madame Clerambault. An old kinswoman, who had brought her up, died. She lived in Berry and bequeathed to the Clerambaults her little property. Madame Clerambault utilised her grief to go away from Paris, which now she detested, and to remove her husband



from this dangerous environment. She was able to add to her grief reasons of self-interest and the health of Rosine, who would be better of the change of air. Clerambault yielded. All three went to take possession of their little heritage and remained in Berry during the summer and the autumn.

It was in the country. An old bourgeois house, at the end of a village. From the agitation of Paris Clerambault passed suddenly to a stagnant calm. In the silence of the days, the crowing of the cocks at the farmhouses, the lowing of the cattle in the meadows, punctuated the monotonous hours. The heart of Clerambault was too feverish to adapt itself to the slow and placid rhythm of nature. Of old he had loved it to the point of adoration ; of old he was in harmony with the people of the country, from whom his family had come. But to-day the peasants with whom he tried to converse appeared to him like men from another planet. Certainly, they were not infected by the virus of war ; they were not impassioned, they did not shew any hatred against the enemy. But they shewed none either against the war. They accepted it as a fact. They were not the dupes of it (certain reflexions of a mischievous good-nature shewed that they knew what price to put on it). In the meanwhile, that done, they utilised it. They did very good business. Without doubt they lost their sons ; but their goods were not lost. They were not unfeeling ; their grief,

though little expressed, was none the less inscribed within them. But after all lives pass, and the earth remains. They, at least, had not, like the bourgeois of the towns, sent through national fanaticism their children to death. Only, they knew how to value their sacrifice, and it is probable that the sons sacrificed would have found this natural. Having lost what one loves, ought one to lose his head? The peasants have not lost theirs. The war has created, it is said, almost a million new proprietors in France.

The thought of Clerambault felt itself exiled. He and those others did not speak the same language. They exchanged with him a few vague condolences. When he speaks to the bourgeois, the peasant always complains, by custom; it is a way of defending himself against a possible appeal to his purse. They would have spoken in the same tone of an epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease. Clerambault remained, for them, the Parisian. If they thought something, they would not say it to him. He belonged to another tribe.

The absence of response stifled the speech of Clerambault. Impressionable as he was, he came not to hear anything. Silence. The voices of friends unknown and far away, who attempted to rejoin him, were intercepted by the postal spy system, one of the scandals which dishonoured that time. Under the pretext of putting down the foreign spy system, the State made spies of its own

citizens. It did not content itself with watching the affairs of State, it violated the thoughts ; it set up agents in the calling of lackeys who listen at the doors. This premium offered to servility filled the country (all countries) with police constables, people of the world, people of letters, a great many of them in a sheltered position, who bought their security by selling that of others, and covered their denunciations with the name of patriotism. Thanks to these informers the free thoughts which sought out one another never succeeded in giving one another a helping hand. The enormous monster, the State, had a suspicious fear of the half-dozen of personalities free, alone, feeble, stripped of ammunition—so much was it troubled with its thorn of bad conscience ! And each one of these free souls, encircled by an occult surveillance, fretted in its prison ; and not knowing that others suffered in the same way, was dying slowly, in the polar ices, frozen in his despair.

The soul which Clerambault carried under his skin was too hot to allow itself to be covered by the winding-sheet of snow. But the soul is not sufficient. The body is a plant which has need of human earth. Deprived of sympathy, reduced to nourishing itself on its own substance, it wastes away. All the arguments of Clerambault to prove to himself that his thought responded to that of thousands of unknown people did not take the place

of the real contact of a single living heart. Faith is sufficient for the spirit. But the heart is like Thomas. It must touch.

Clerambault had not foreseen this physical weakness. Asphyxia. His skin dry, his blood drunk by the burnt body, the sources of life dried up. It was as if he were under an exhausted vacuum bell. A wall separated him from the air.

Now, one evening that he had, like a consumptive patient on an oppressive day, wandered from room to room in the house, in quest of a breath of air, a letter arrived, which had succeeded in passing through the meshes of the net. An old man like himself, a schoolmaster in a village, in a sequestered valley of Dauphiny, said :

“The war has taken all from me. Of those whom I knew, it has killed some ; the others I do not know any more. All that which made life worth living, my hope of progress, my faith in a future of fraternal reason, have been stamped under. I was dying of despair, when, by chance, a newspaper which insulted you made me acquainted with your articles ‘*To the Dead*’ and ‘*To her who has been loved.*’ I have read them and I have wept with joy. I am not then alone. I do not suffer alone ? You believe in it still, Monsieur ; in this faith, say I. You believe in it ? It lives always ; they will not kill it ? Ah ! how that does one good ! I ended by doubting. Pardon me, but I am old, I am alone, I am

very tired. . . . I bless you, Monsieur. Now I will die in peace. Now I know, thanks to you, that I have not been deceived. . . .”

That acted as if, instantaneously, the air had re-entered by a fissure. His lungs distended, his heart recommenced to beat, the source of life re-opened again and recommenced to fill the channel of the parched soul. O what need people have of one another's love ! . . . The outstretched hand, in the hour of my anguish, the hand which has made me feel that I was not a branch torn from the tree, but which I press to my heart, I save thee and thou savest me ; I give thee my strength, it dies if thou dost not take it. The solitary truth is like a spark, which flies off from the flint, dry, stinging, ephemeral. Is it going to be extinguished ? No. It has touched another soul. A star lights up at the further end of the horizon. . . . He saw it only for an instant. It went back under a cloud, and disappeared for ever.

Clerambault wrote, the same day, to the unknown friend ; he confided to him with effusion his experiences and his dangerous convictions. The letter remained without a reply. After several weeks Clerambault wrote again without more success. Such was his hunger for a friend with whom to exchange his grief and hope, that he took the train to Grenoble and from there went along the road on foot, to the village of which he had the

address. But when, with his heart joyous at the surprise he was going to cause, he knocked at the door of the school, the man who opened it did not understand anything of what he spoke. After explanation, he learned that the schoolmaster with whom he spoke was newly come to the village. His predecessor had been displaced, a month before, and sent in disgrace, to a region far away. But he had not been troubled to make the journey. An inflammation of the lungs had carried him away on the evening of the day on which he was required to quit the country in which he had lived for thirty years. He lodged in it still. He was under the ground. Clerambault saw the cross still fresh on the mound. And he never knew if the dead friend had received his words of affection. It was better for him to remain in doubt. No, the departed friend had not received his letters ; they had stolen from him even this glimmer of joy. . . .

The end of summer in Berry was one of the most arid periods in the life of Clerambault. He spoke with no one. He no longer wrote anything. He had no means of communicating directly with the working people. On the rare occasions on which he had come into contact with them (in crowds, at fêtes, or at working men's schools) he made himself friendly. But a timidity, ultimately reciprocal, prevented confidence. On the one side as on the other, there was the feeling, proud or constrained,

of his inferiority ; for Clerambault believed himself in many things, and those the most essential, to be inferior to the intelligent working men.—(He was right ; it is from their ranks that the leaders of the future will be recruited)—The élite among the working men consisted then of honest and virile spirits who would have been able to understand Clerambault ; with an idealism intact, they remained firmly attached to the real ; accustomed by their daily life to the battle, to deceptions, to treacheries, those men (of whom several were, although still young, veterans in the social battle) were trained to patience ; and they would have been able to teach Clerambault. They knew that everything must be bought, that one gets nothing for nothing, that those who wish the happiness of the men to come must pay for it with their own sufferings, that the smallest progress is obtained only step by step, and is often lost twenty times before being gained definitely . . . (Nothing is definite. . . . ) Clerambault would have had great need of those men, solid and patient as the earth. And his ardent intelligence would have enlightened them.

But they carried, both they and he, the burden of the system of castes (archaic, hurtful, pernicious to the community not less than to the individual), which the excessive inequality of fortunes, of education, and of life creates between the supposedly

equal citizens of our lying democracies. They only communicated from caste to caste by journalists, who, forming a caste by themselves, represented neither the ones nor the others. The lonely voice of the newspapers filled up the silence of Clerambault. Nothing was able to trouble their "Brekekekex ! coax ! coax !"

The disastrous results of a new offensive found them, as always, undaunted. The optimistic oracles of the pontiffs of the rear were once more given the lie. No one appeared to notice it. Other oracles succeeded them, possessed with the same assurance. Neither those who wrote, nor those who read, perceived that they were deceived. In all sincerity, they did not perceive it. What they had said yesterday, they no longer remembered. What the devil can one make of creatures like those. Brains of squirrels ! Head high, head low. One is not in any case able to deny them the gift of finding themselves on their feet, after their capers. One conviction per day. The quality does not matter, since one renews it. . . .

Towards the end of the autumn, to sustain the morale, which was lowering at the idea of the griefs of the winter, a new propaganda of German atrocities was begun in the press. It succeeded perfectly. The thermometer of opinion mounted quickly to fever heat. Even in the quiet village of the Berry, for several weeks tongues gave expression



to cruel proposals ; the village priest associated himself with them, and preached a sermon of vengeance. Clerambault, who learned of it from his wife, at breakfast, shewed, without restraint, what he thought of it, before the maid who served at the table. By evening all the village knew that he was a Hun ; and every morning after, Clerambault could read it, inscribed on his door. The temper of Madame Clerambault was not sweetened by it. And Rosine, who in the juvenile grief at her lost love passed through a crisis of religiosity, was too much occupied with her saddened soul and with its metamorphoses, to think about the troubles of others. The most tender natures have their hours of simple and downright egoism.

LEFT alone to himself, deprived of the means of action, Clerambault turned against himself his fever of thought. Nothing kept him back from the road of bitter truth. Nothing came to modify the cruel light. He felt within himself the scorched soul of those *fuorusciti* who, thrown back from the walls of the cruel city, look at it from the outside, with eyes without faith. It was no longer the painful vision of the first night of trials, of which the bleeding wounds united him still to his human group. All the ties were broken. His too lucid spirit descended whirling to the abyss. The descent to hell. Slowly, from circle, and alone, in the silence. . . .

“ I see you, herds, peoples, myriads of beings, who require to squeeze yourselves in benches in order to spawn and think ! Each one of your groupments has its special odour, which appears sacred to it. Like the bees ; the stench of their queen achieves the unity of the hive and their joy in working. Like the ants ; whoever does not smell like me and my race, I kill. Beehives of men, each of you has your odour of race, of religion, of morals, of ritual customs. It impregnates your body, your bees-wax, your nest of eggs. It smears your life

from birth to death. Woe to him who washes it off.

“Whoso wishes to inhale the musty smell of this thought of swarms, the sweat of the nightmare nights of a people, let him look from a distance at the rites and beliefs in the backgrounds of history ! Let him ask the banterer Herodotus to turn before him the film of human wandering, that long panorama of social customs, ignoble or ridiculous, but always venerated, of the Scythians, the Issedones, the Gatae, the Nasamones, the Gindarenes, the Sauromates, the Lydians, the Libyans, and the Egyptians ; bipeds of every colour, from the Orient to the Occident, and from the North to the South. The Great King, a wit, playfully suggests to the Greeks, who burn their dead, that they should eat them, and that the Hindoos, who eat their dead, should burn them ; and he laughs at their indignation. But the wise Herodotus, who doffs his cap, while smiling behind it, declines to condemn them, for if one proposed to all men to make a choice among the best laws of the different countries, each one would decide for those of his country ; to such an extent is it true that each one is persuaded that there is none better. Also there is nothing truer than the words of Pindar ; *Custom is the queen of all men.* . . .

“Each one drinks out of his own trough. But he should surely permit others to drink out of theirs.

Not at all ! Because if he is to enjoy his own, he must spit in that of his neighbour. The god wishes it. For he must have a god—whatever it be, a man or a beast, or even an object, a red line or a black line, or after the manner of the Middle Ages, a martlet, a crow, or a coat of arms—to discharge on it his insanities.

“ To-day, when a flag has succeeded the coat of arms, we proclaim ourselves freed from superstitions ! When were they more dense ? Now the new dogma, Equality, obliges us to stink exactly the ones like the others. We are not even free to say that we are not free ; that would be a sacrilege ! One must, with one’s pack on one’s back, shout : ‘ Long live liberty ! ’ The daughter of Cheops, by the order of her father, became a harlot, in order to contribute, by the money from her womb, to the building of the Pyramid. To raise the pyramid of our massive Republics, millions of citizens prostitute their conscience, prostitute soul and body to lies, to hatred. . . . Oh ! we are past masters in the great art of lying ! . . . Indeed, that has always been so. But the difference with those of the past is that they knew they were liars, and were not far from agreeing to it innocently, as if it were a natural necessity. ‘ I will lie,’ said Darius, frankly, ‘ for when it is useful to lie, one must not scruple about it. Those who lie desire the same thing as those who speak the truth ; one lies, in the hope of securing

some profit ; one speaks the truth, with a view to some advantage, and to secure confidence. Thus, although we do not go along the same road, none the less we go towards the same goal ; for if there were nothing to be gained, it would be a matter of indifference to him who told the truth if he told a lie, and to him who lied if he told the truth.'—But we, my contemporaries, are much more chaste ; we do not behold ourselves lying, in public ; we lie behind closed doors ; we lie to ourselves. And we never admit it, even to our bonnet. No, we do not lie. We 'idealise.' . . . Come away, may your eyes be seen, and may your eyes see, ye free men !

"Free ! In what respect are you free ? And who among you is free, among your nations of to-day ? Are you free to act ? No, since the State disposes of your life and causes you to be assassins or assassinated. Are you free to speak and to write ? No, because you are imprisoned when you speak your thought. Are you free to think for yourself ? No, if you do not conceal it well ; and the bottom of a cellar is not yet safe enough. Keep silent, be on your guard ! You are well watched. . . . Convict guard for action : non-com.'s and brass hats. Convict guard for the mind : Churches and Universities, which prescribe what one must believe and what one must disown. . . . What do you complain of ? (But you do not complain !) By no means of fatigue of thought ! Repeat the catechism !

“ You say that the catechism has been freely consented to by the sovereign people ? A fine sovereignty ! Simpletons, who blow out your cheeks at the word Democracy ! . . . Democracy is the art practised by a few pretenders to honesty, of substituting themselves for the people, and of despoiling it, in the solemn name of Democracy, for their own profit. In times of peace the people knows nothing of what is happening beyond what it is told in its muzzled press, by those to whose interest it is to dupe it. Truth is put under lock and key. In time of war it is even better. It is the people who are locked up. Admitting that they have never known what they wanted, it is then impossible for them to say a single word. Obey. *Perinde ac cadaver*. . . . Ten millions of corpses. . . . The living are hardly better off, being obliged for four years to be obsequious to a debasing régime of patriotic shams, of fair parades, of tom-tom, of menaces, of quackeries, of hatreds, of indictments, of trials for treason, of summary executions. Demagogues have levied the forces of obscurantism, to extinguish the last glimmers of good sense which might persist in their people, and to make them idiots.

“ To enslave them is not enough. It is necessary to make them so stupid that they will wish to be enslaved. The formidable autocracies of Egypt, of Persia, and of Assyria, which played with the lives

of millions of men, drew the mystery of their power from the supernatural radiance of their pseudo-divinity. All absolute monarchy had to be from the beginning of the centuries of credulity, a theocracy. In our democracies, it is impossible to believe in the divinity of clowns, like our rotten and despised ministers ; we have seen them too near at hand, we know their foolishnesses. . . . They have then invented the idea of putting God behind the curtain of their booth. God, that is the Republic, the Country, Justice, Civilisation. There are pictures of them at the entrance. Each booth at the fair displays in multi-coloured placards, its beautiful Giantess. And there are millions who rush to see her. But one is not told what they who come out again think of her. They would be greatly embarrassed to think anything about her ! Some do not come out again, and the others have not seen anything. But as for those who remained outside gaping at the stage—they see something. God is there. He is there, in the picture. The gods, it is the desire of everyone to believe in the gods.

“ But why the furious light of this desire ? Because one does not wish to see the reality. And again, *because one sees the reality*. There is in that all that is tragical in humanity, *it does not wish to see and to know*. It must, desperately, deify its slime. As for us, let us dare to look at it !

“ The instinct of murder is inscribed on the heart

of nature. It is an instinct truly diabolical, since it seems to have created beings, not only to eat, but to be eaten. A species of cormorants eats the fishes of the sea. The fishermen exterminate the birds. The fishes disappear, for they were nourished by the excrements of the birds, which were nourished by the fishes. Thus the chain of beings is a coiled serpent, which eats itself. . . . If only conscience had not been created, to witness its own torture. How is it possible to escape from this hell. . . . Two ways only ; that of Buddha, who blots out in himself the grievous Illusion of life, and the way of the religious Illusions, which throw the veil of a dazzling lie over crime and grief. The people which devours the others is the Chosen People ; it works for God. The weight of iniquities, which bears down one of the scales of life, finds its counterpoise in the beyond of dreams, where wounds and pains are cured. The forms of this vary, from people to people, and from epoch to epoch. And their variations are called Progress. But it is always the same need of illusion. It is necessary to gag the mouth of this terrible Conscience, which sees, which sees, and which demands an account of this unjust law ! If one does not find it a food to grind, a faith, it roars with hunger and fright.—Believe ! . . . Believe or die !—And that is why they have made themselves into a herd. To confirm themselves. To make of their individual doubts a common certitude.



“What then are we going to do with the truth? The truth is for them the enemy. But they do not admit it to themselves. By a tacit understanding they call the truth the disgusting amalgam of a little truth and much lie. The little truth serves to paint the lie. Lie and servitude ; eternal servitude. . . . It is not the monuments of faith and of love which are most durable. Those of servitude are much more so. Rheims and the Parthenon fall in ruins. But the Pyramids of Egypt defy the centuries. Around them the desert, its mirages and moving sands. . . . When I think of the thousands of independent people, whom the spirit of servitude has engulfed, in the course of centuries, heretics and revolutionaries, refractories, lay and religious, I am no longer astonished at the mediocrity which extends over the world, like a low and greasy water.

“We, who float on the gloomy surface, what will we do in face of the implacable universe, in which the strongest eternally crushes the feeblest and encounters eternally a stronger who crushes him in his turn? Reduce ourselves to the voluntary sacrifice, through sorrowful and tired compassion? Or rather participate in the slaughter of the feeble, without even the shadow of an illusion about the blind cosmic cruelty? Or, what else can we do? Try to keep ourselves out of the hopeless *mêlée*, through egoism, or through prudence, which is another form of egoism? . . .”

For, in this crisis of acute pessimism which corroded Clerambault, in these months of inhuman loneliness, he could not envisage even the possibility of Progress. This Progress, in which he had believed of old, as others believe in the good God. Now, he saw the human species given up to a murderous destiny. After having ravaged the planet, exterminated the other species, it destroyed itself by its own hands. That was the law of Justice. Man has only become the sovereign of the earth by usurpation, by cunning and by force (but mainly by cunning). More noble creatures than himself have perhaps—certainly—disappeared under his blows. He has destroyed some, degraded and brutalised the others. He has pretended, for thousands of years, that he shares life with the other creatures, that he does not understand them (he lies !), that he does not see in them brothers, like himself, suffering, loving, dreaming. In order better to exploit them, to torture them, without remorse, he has said through the men of learning that these creatures do not think, that he alone had that privilege. And he is not far from saying it to-day of the other human beings, whom he cuts up and destroys. . . . Hangman, Hangman, you have not had pity. By what right do you beg it to-day ?

OF the old friendships which formerly surrounded Clerambault, a solitary one remained to him, that of Madame Mairet, whose husband had just been killed in the Argonne.

François Mairet, who had not yet attained forty years of age, when he fell obscurely in the trenches, was one of the leading French biologists. A modest scientist, a great worker, he possessed a patient genius, and fame ultimately came to him. He was not anxious to receive the visit of this lovely prostitute ; one shares her favours with too many intriguers. The silent joys which the intimacy of science gives to its elect sufficed for him, and one heart only on earth with whom to experience them. His wife was his help-mate in all his thoughts. A little younger than he, belonging to a university family, she was one of those serious souls, loving, feeble and proud, who have need to give themselves, but who give themselves only once. She lived the spiritual life of Mairet. Perhaps she would have been quite as well able to share that of another man, if circumstances had united her to him. But, having married Mairet, she married him entirely. Like many of the best women, her intelligence was quick

to understand him whom her heart had chosen. She made herself his pupil, to become his associate. She participated in his labours, in his laboratory researches. They had no children, and held communion in thought. Both of them were free of mind, with a high ideal freed from all religion, as from all national superstition.

In 1914, Mairet, mobilised, went, without any illusion about the cause, to do his duty, which the chances of the times and of the countries had imposed on him. He sent from the front stoic and lucid letters. He had never ceased to see the ignominy of the war ; but he thought himself obliged to make the sacrifice, to obey the destiny which had incorporated him with the errors, the sufferings, and the confused struggles of a poor animal species, evolving slowly towards an unknown end.

He knew Clerambault. An acquaintanceship in the country between the two families, before both had been transplanted to Paris, had been the basis of amicable relations, more lasting than intimate, for Mairet never opened his heart to anyone but his wife, and resting above all on indestructible esteem.

Since the commencement of the war, each of them was occupied with his own cares, and they had not corresponded. Those who fought did not send their letters to many friends ; they concentrated on a single loved one, to whom they told everything. Mairet, more than ever, had made of his companion

the sole depositary of his confidences. His letters were a diary, in which he thought aloud. In one of the last letters he spoke of Clerambault. He had known of his first articles, through the nationalist newspapers, which alone were tolerated at the front, and which quoted extracts from them, in order to abuse them. He told his wife what relief the speech of an honest man, outraged, had brought him ; and he asked her to let Clerambault know that his old friendship for him had, on account of it, become closer and warmer. A short time after, he died, before having received the succeeding articles, which he had asked Madame Mairet to send to him.

After he had gone, she who lived only for him sought to come nearer to the people who had been near to him, during the past period of his life. She wrote to Clerambault. He who was consuming himself in his retreat in the country, without having the energy to tear himself away from it, received, as if it had been a deliverance, the appeal of Madame Mairet. He returned to Paris. Both of them found a bitter sweetness in calling up together the form of the absent one. They formed a habit of reserving one evening per week to shut themselves up with him. Clerambault was the only one of the friends of Mairet who was able to understand the tragedy hidden by a sacrifice which no patriotic illusion gilded over.

At first, Madame Mairet found some relief in

delivering up all that she had received. She read the letters to him, the undeceiving confidences ; they meditated on them with emotion, and they led them to discuss the problems which had caused the death of Mairét, and that of millions of others. In this bitter examination, nothing stopped Clerambault. And she was not the woman to flinch, in the search for truth. Still, however, . . .

Clerambault soon perceived an uneasiness, which his words caused in her, while he spoke out that which she knew well, and which the letters of Mairét clearly established ; the criminal uselessness of those deaths ; and the barrenness of the heroism. She tried to take back what she had already confided ; she discussed the meaning of it with a passion which did not seem always to be in very good faith ; she recollected words of Mairét which shewed him closer to the common opinion, and which appeared to approve of it. One day, Clerambault, listening to her re-reading a letter, which she had already read to him, remarked that she passed over a phrase of it, in which the heroic pessimism of Mairét was expressed. And, as he insisted, she appeared hurt ; her manners became more distant ; her stiffness of manner changed progressively into coldness, then into irritation, then even into a sort of dull animosity. She ended by avoiding him ; and, without open rupture, he felt that she had a grudge against him and that she would not see him more.

According as the remorseless analysis of Clerambault was pursued, which analysis destroyed the foundation of current beliefs, an inverse work of reconstruction and idealisation was going on in the mind of Madame Mairêt. Her grief required to be convinced that it had, in spite of all, a sacred cause. The dead man was no longer there, to aid her to bear the truth. The most awful truth, with two, is still a joy. But to one who is alone, it is mortal.

Clerambault understood it. His trembling sensitiveness perceived that he was causing suffering ; and the pain of this woman became his own. And he was not far from approving of her revolt against him. He saw the immense hidden grief, and the inefficacy of the truth which he brought to remedy it. Much more ! The pain which she adds to the pain which exists already. . . .

Insoluble problem ! These unfortunates are not able to dispense with the murderous illusions of which they are the victims ! One cannot tear them away from them, without their sufferings becoming intolerable. Those families which have lost sons, husbands, fathers, have need to believe that it is for something right and true. Those statesmen, who lie, are forced to continue to lie, to others and to themselves. If they stopped for an instant, life would not be supportable for them, nor for those of whom they have charge. Unhappy man, the prey of his ideas, to which he had given all, is

obliged to give them more every day, otherwise he will find the void under his feet, and he will fall. . . . What ! after four years of sufferings and ruins beyond description we must admit that it has been for nothing—that not only the victory will be ruinous, but that it could not be otherwise, that the war was absurd, and that we have been deceived ! . . . Never ! Better to die to the last man. A single man, whom one causes to recognise that his life has been lost, is overcome with despair. What would it be with a nation, with ten nations, with an entire civilisation ! . . .

Clerambault heard the cry of the human multitude :

“ We must live, at whatever cost ! We must save ourselves, at any price ! ”

“ But that is, precisely, what you do not do ! The way you are going leads to new catastrophes, to an infinite sum of sufferings.”

“ However frightful they may be, they are still less than what you offer us. It is better to die with illusion, than to live without illusion ! To live without illusion. . . . No ! that is a living death.”

*He who has deciphered the secret of life, and who has read the motto of it, says the voice of the harmonious Amiel, the disenchanted, escapes from the great wheel of existence, he has come out of the world of the living. . . . The illusion having vanished, nothingness resumes its*



*eternal reign, the coloured bubble of air has burst in infinite space, and the misery of thought is dissolved in the immutable repose of illimited void.*

But this repose in the void is the worst torture for the white man. "Better all the torments, all the torments of life ! Do not tear them away from me ! Murderer, who takes away forcibly, the torturing lie, on which I live !" . . .

Clerambault bitterly applied to himself the title which a nationalist journal had given him : *One against all*. Yes, the common enemy, the destroyer of illusions which support life. . . .

And he did not wish it. He suffered too much from the thought of causing suffering. How then could he get out of the tragic dilemma ? On whatever side he turned, always the insoluble dilemma ; either the mortal illusion, or death without illusion.

"I do not wish either the one or the other.

"Whether thou wishest it or not, yield ! The road is closed !"

"Nevertheless I will pass."

## PART FOUR

CLERAMBAULT traversed a new danger zone. His journey in solitude was like the ascent of a mountain, where one finds oneself suddenly enveloped by fogs, while clutching the rock, without being able to advance. He no longer saw in front of him. Whichever way he turned, he heard the torrent of suffering roaring at the bottom. Still, however, he could not remain immovable. He hung over the abyss, and the support threatened to give way.

He was at one of those dark turnings. To make it worse, on that day, the news from the outside, which was barked out by the press, wrung the soul by their insanity ; useless hecatombs, which the induced egoism of the readers of the rear found natural ; cruelties on all sides, criminal reprisals for crimes—for which these formerly good people clamoured for and acclaimed. The horizon which encloses the poor human beasts in their burrow had never appeared darker and more denuded of pity.

Clerambault asked himself if the law of love which he felt within himself was not made for other worlds and other humanities. In his mail he had just found

new letters of menaces ; and knowing that, in the tragic absurdity of the times, his life was at the mercy of the first madman who came along, he wished secretly that this meeting might not be too long delayed. However, being of good race, and well rooted, he continued on his way, as usual, accomplishing methodically his daily actions, and held himself firmly to them, in order to go to the end, whatever it might be, of the road along which he had determined to go—with his head high and without yielding.

He remembered that on this day, he had arranged to go to see his niece Aline, who had just given birth to a child. She was the daughter of a sister who was dead, and whom he loved. Somewhat older than Maxime she had been his companion in childhood. As a young girl, she had a complicated character : restless and dissatisfied, she wanted everything for herself, wanted to be loved, and to tyrannise. She was too envious, was attracted by dangerous experiments, somewhat lacking in sweetness, passionate, spiteful, peevish, and able to make herself suddenly tender and captivating. Between Maxime and herself, the game had been carried on to a dangerous extent ; so that it had been necessary to take care. Maxime allowed himself to be captivated, in spite of his irony, by the hard little eyes, which transpierced him with their electric flashes ; and, Aline was provoked, attracted by the irony of Maxime.

They had liked each other very well, and had angered one another, and later, they had both gone on to something else. She had caused trouble in two or three other hearts ; and she had been married, very well, when she judged that the hour and the occasion had come—(there is a time for everything)—with an honourable commercial man who did good business, at the head of an art and ecclesiastical furnishing warehouse, rue Buonaparte. She was about to have a child when her husband was sent to the front. One could not doubt that she was an ardent patriot ; she who loves herself loves her own people ; and it was not from her that Clerambault had sought some understanding for his ideas of fraternal pity. She had little of it for her friends. She had none for her enemies. She could have pounded them in a mortar, with the same unfeeling joy with which she formerly tortured hearts or insects, in order to avenge herself for the annoyances which others had caused her.

But according as the fruit she carried ripened, her attention was concentrated upon it ; the forces of her heart flowed back to the interior. The war receded into the distance ; she did not hear the cannon of Noyon. When she spoke of it—which she did less and less, each day—it seemed that it consisted of colonial expeditions. Without doubt she remembered the dangers of her husband ; certainly she pitied him—"Poor boy !"—with a

little smile of pity, as much as to say : " He has really no luck ! He is not very clever ! " . . . But she did not dwell on this subject, and it did not leave traces, thank God ! Her conscience was at rest ; she had paid her score. And quickly she returned to the only serious task. One would have thought that the great affair for the universe was the egg which she was about to lay.

Clerambault, absorbed by his struggles, had not seen Aline for months ; he had not, therefore, been able to follow this change of mind. If Rosine had said words about it before him, his attention was elsewhere. But he had just learned, one thing after another, in twenty-four hours, of the birth of the child, and the news that the husband of Aline was, like Maxime, " missing." He had quickly imagined the grief of the young mother. He saw her as he had always known her—between one joy and one grief, more capable of feeling the one than the other, giving herself up to it entirely, and while still in a condition of joy, exerting herself to find reasons for grief—violent, bitter, agitated and aggressive—against fate, and having a grudge against everybody. He was not even sure that she would not have a grudge against him personally for his ideas of reconciliation, when she could only breathe vengeance. He knew that his attitude was a scandal for the family, and that nobody would be less disposed to tolerate it than Aline. But whether he was well or

ill received, he felt himself obliged to give her the assistance of his affection. And, bending his back under the shower which was about to fall, he mounted the staircase and rung the bell at the door of his niece.

He found her lying in bed, near by her little child, which she had caused to be placed beside her. Her face was calm and had grown young again—handsome, softened and beaming with happiness. She had the appearance of a radiant big sister of the ruffled baby ; she contemplated it with laughs of amused adoration, whilst the child, lying on its back with open mouth, moved in the air his spidery legs, swallowed up in the torpor of the *avant-vie*, dreaming still of the golden night, and the heat of the womb. She received Clerambault in accents of triumph :

“ Ah ! dear uncle ! How nice you are ! Come quickly, come and see the treasure of my love ! ”

She exulted in making a show of her masterpiece, and she was grateful to the spectators. Clerambault had never found her as tender and pretty. He bent over the child, but he hardly looked at it, though making grimaces of politeness and admiring exclamations which the mother was waiting for, and which she snapped up in the flight like a swallow. It was Aline whom he saw, her happy face, her good laughing eyes, her good childish laugh ! . . . How fine happiness is, and how beneficent ! . . . All

that he had to say had disappeared from his memory—useless, misplaced. He only required to look at the marvel and partake complacently of the ecstasy of the little egg-laying hen. What a delicious, ridiculously vain, innocent little song !

At moments, however, over his eyes passed the shadow of the war, of slaughterings, ignoble and without purpose, of a son killed, of a husband missing ; and, leaning over the child with a sad smile, he could not help thinking :

“ Alas ! why more children if it is for this butchery ? And what will he see in twenty years, the poor child ? ”

But she hardly thought about it ! The shadow died at the edge of her sun. Of these cares, near or distant—all far away—she perceived nothing, she beamed :

“ I have made a man ! . . . ”

This man-child, in whom were incarnated, for each mother in her turn, all the hopes of humanity. Sadnesses and madnesses of the present hour, where are you ? . . . What does it matter ! It is *he*, perhaps it is *he* who will put an end to them. . . . He is for each mother the miracle, the Messiah ! . . .

At the end of the visit, Clerambault ventured a word of grieved sympathy about her husband. She gave a deep sigh :

“ Poor Armand ! ” she said. “ He must be a prisoner. ” . . .

Clerambault asked :

“ You have learned something ? ”

“ Ah ! no. . . . But it is probable. . . . I am almost quite sure. . . . Otherwise one would know.” . . .

She brushed away with her hand, as if it were a fly, the end of the disagreeable thought. . . . (Go away ! . . . why have we allowed it to enter ? . . .)

Already the little laugh returned to her eyes. . . .

“ And you know,” added she, “ it is much better for him. . . . He will be able to rest. I am more heartened to know that he is there now, than if he were in the trenches.” . . .

And then, without hesitation, the conversation returned to the prodigy :

“ Oh ! how pleased he will be when he sees my little love of the good God ! ” . . .

Only when Clerambault rose to go away, she deigned to remember that there were still griefs on the earth. She remembered the death of Maxime, and said nicely her little word of sympathy . . . which one felt to be so indifferent, so indifferent at the bottom ! . . . but full of good-will. And the good-will was, with her, something new. . . . More surprising still ! In the tenderness of the happiness in which she was bathed, she had a glimpse for the space of a second, of the fatigued face and heart of the old man. It returned to her mind vaguely, that he had done foolish things, that he had vexations ; and,



instead of chiding him about them, as she should have done, she accorded him tacitly her forgiveness, with a magnanimous smile. Like a little princess, she said in an affectionate tone, through which could be felt a tinge of protectiveness :

. . . " Do not worry, my good uncle, all is well. Kiss me ! " . . .

And Clerambault went away amused at the consolatrice whom he had come to console. He felt how little our sufferings were for the cold smile of Nature. The important thing for her is to flourish in the Springtime. Dead leaves, fall ! The tree will only flourish the better, the Springtime will bloom for others. . . . Dear Springtime !

BUT, how cruel thou art, O Springtime, towards those for whom thou wilt not bloom any more ! Those who have lost their loved ones, their hopes, their strength and their youth, all their reasons for living ! . . .

The world was full of mutilated souls and bodies, which the bitterness corroded, some of lost happinesses, others more lamentable still, of happiness which they had not had, of which they had been balked, in the full bloom of their love and of their twenty years.

One evening towards the end of January, cold and soaked with damp, Clerambault was returning from waiting in a queue at a woodyard. After having stood for hours, in the street, the crowd, among whom he waited his turn, had been informed that there would be no more distributions that day. At the door of his house, he heard his name. A young man was asking the porter for him, while presenting a letter. Clerambault advanced. The young man appeared troubled to meet him. His right arm was in a sling ; the right eye hidden under a bandage ; he was pale, and one could see that he had just emerged from long months of illness. Clerambault

accosted him amicably, and wanted to take the letter, which the young man withdrew with suddenness, saying that it was no longer needed. Clerambault invited him to come up for a chat. The other hesitated ; and if Clerambault had been more observant he would have noticed that his visitor sought to escape. But, a little slow in reading thoughts, he said simply :

“ It is true that my flat is a little high.” . . .

Piqued, the other quickly replied :

“ I am still capable of climbing.”

Clerambault understood that, besides other wounds, he had a heart which had been stung to the quick.

They seated themselves in the fireless study. Like the room, the conversation was slow to thaw. Clerambault received from his interlocutor only stiff responses, blunt, not very clear, and in a tone which seemed irritated. He learned that his visitor was Julien Moreau, that he was a student at the Faculty of Letters, and that he had just passed three months at Val-de-Grace. He lived alone, in Paris, in the Quartier Latin, although his mother, a widow, with some of a family, lived at Orleans. He did not say at first why he did not join them.

Suddenly, after a silence, he decided to speak. With a choking voice, which was harsh to begin with, then which little by little became gentler, he told Clerambault the good which the reading of his

articles had done him, which articles had been brought to the trenches by a soldier who had been on leave, and which had been circulated from hand to hand. They responded to the cry of the stifled soul : " Do not lie ! " The newspapers, the writings—which had the impudence to present to the soldiers a deceitful description of the armies, faked letters from the front, a strolling-player heroism, misplaced pleasantries, the abject bragging of the sheltered fools who make rhetoric with the death of others—threw them into fury. The dirty, sticky kisses, with which the prostitutes of the press soaked them, were an outrage ; it was as if one turned up their sufferings in derision. At last, in Clerambault they found an echo. . . . Not that he understood them ! No one could understand them who had not shared their lot. But he had pity for them. He spoke simply, with humanity, of the unhappy men of all the camps. He spoke of the injustices, common to all nations, which had created these common sufferings. He did not conceal their torment ; but he elevated it to a sphere of vital intelligence.

. . . If you knew how one has need of a word of true sympathy ! It is in vain that we are hardened, after all we have seen, suffered, and caused to suffer—it is in vain that we are old—(there are among us grey-haired men with rounded shoulders). We are, at moments, all lost children who look for their mother, to be consoled. And those mothers

often . . . ah ! those mothers ! They are so far from us, they also ! . . . One receives from the family letters which dishearten. . . . One is delivered up by people of his own blood. . . .

Clerambault hid his face in his hands and began to groan.

"What is the matter ?" said Moreau. "You are ill ?"

"You have just recalled to me the evil which I have done."

"You ? Why no, it is the others."

"I as well as the others. Forgive us all."

"You are the last one who ought to say it."

"I ought to be the first ; I am one of those rare ones who realise their crime."

And he began a speech against his generation, which he interrupted with a gesture of discouragement.

"All that does not mend anything. Tell me what you have suffered."

There was in his voice so much humility that Moreau felt himself overflowing with affection for the old man who accused himself. His defiance melted away. He opened the secret door of his bitter and bruised thought. He admitted that, several times already, he had come to the entrance of the house, without deciding to send his letter—(which, besides, he refused to shew). Since he had come out of the hospital he had not been able to speak with anyone. The people of the rear dis-

gusted him by the display of their little preoccupations with their business, with their pleasures, with their restrictions to their pleasures, with their egoism, with their ignorance and their lack of understanding. He was a stranger among them, more so than if he had been among the savages of Africa. Besides—(he interrupted himself, took back what he had said, by troubled and irritated half-words, which remained hung up in his throat)—it was not only among them, it was among *all* men, that he was a stranger ; cut off from the normal life, from the joys and labours of all, by his infirmities which made him a waif ; he was blind of an eye and maimed ; he had an absurd shame of them which scorched him. The looks of hasty commiseration, which he imagined he got surreptitiously in the street, caused him to blush, as if it had been alms which are given sideways, the head being turned away from an unpleasant spectacle. For, in his pride, he exaggerated his ugliness. He was disgusted with his deformity. He thought of his lost joys, of his destroyed youth ; he was jealous of the couples whom he saw passing, and shut himself up to weep.

That was not yet all ; and when he had discharged the main part of his bitterness in the compassion of Clerambault, who encouraged him to speak, he touched the root of the evil, which he and his companions carried with terror, like a cancer

which one does not dare to look at. Through those dark, violent, distressed words, Clerambault perceived what devastated the soul of those young people ; it was not only their ruined youth, their sacrificed life (although that was a terrible anguish. . . . Oh, it is easy for hard hearts, for old egoists, for lean intellectuals, to blame severely this love of young life, and the despair of losing it ! . . . ). But the most frightful thing was not knowing why one sacrificed this life, and the poisoned suspicion that it was being wasted for nothing. For it was not the stupid allurements of a vain supremacy of race, or of a morsel of disputed land between States, which could appease the suffering of the victims. They knew now how much ground a man has need of to die in, and that the blood of all the races is part of the same river of life.

And Clerambault, to whom the realisation of his duty as an elder brother to those young people gave a strength that he otherwise would not have had, charged their messenger with words of hope and consolation.

“ No, your sufferings are not lost. They are the fruit of a cruel error. But the errors, even, are not lost. The plague of to-day is the explosion of an evil which has corroded Europe for centuries. Pride and covetousness, Stateism without conscience, capitalistic plague, monstrous machine of ‘ Civilisation,’ made of intolerance, of hypocrisy,

and of violence. Everything cracks up, everything has to be begun again, and the task is immense. Don't speak of discouragement ! You have the greatest work which can be offered to a generation. It is a question of seeing clearly, beyond the fire of the trenches, and the asphyxiating gases which come from the agitators of the rear which blind you as well as the enemy. Of discerning the true battle. It is not against a people. It is against an unwholesome society, founded on the exploitations and the rivalry of peoples, on the enslavement of the free conscience to the State machine. The peoples, resigned or sceptical, would not have recognised it, with this tragic evidence, without the sufferings of this war which harries them.

“ I do not bless suffering. Leave that aberration to the devotees of the old religions ! We do not love grief, and we wish joy. But when grief comes, at least let it serve us ! That which you suffer, may others no more suffer ! Now then, do not yield ! You have been taught that once the order to attack is given in battle, it is more dangerous to retire than to advance. Do not go back, therefore, leave your ruins behind, and march towards the new world ! ” As he spoke, he remarked the eyes of his young auditor, which seemed to say :

“ Still ! still more ! More than hopes ! Give me certainties, give me early victory ! ”

There is in all men a similar need of illusion.



Even with the best. In exchange for their sacrifices for the ideal of which they have had a glimpse, it is necessary to promise them the early realisation of their ideal, or, at least, an eternal compensation, as the religions do. Jesus was followed only because one ascribed to him the assurance of a victory here below, or on high. But he who wishes to be true cannot promise victory. He cannot ignore the risks ; perhaps victory will not be attained ; in any case, not here for a long time. For the disciples such a thought is an overwhelming pessimism. The master himself, however, is not a pessimist. He has the calm of a man, who, after an ascent, sees from on high the ensemble of the country. The others see only the arid declivity to be ascended. How is this calm to be communicated to them ? . . . But if they cannot see through the eyes of the master, they can see his eyes, in which is reflected the vision which is refused to them ; they obtain there the assurance that he who knows the truth (they believe it ! . . .) is delivered from their troubles.

This security of soul, this interior harmony, which the eyes of Julien Moreau sought in the eyes of Clerambault, Clerambault, distressed, did not possess. . . Did not possess at all ? . . . Now, looking at Julien, smiling humbly, as if to excuse himself, he saw . . . he saw that Julien had found it in him. . . . And behold, just as in ascending from the midst of a fog one suddenly finds himself in the

light, he saw that the light was in him. The light had come to him, because it was necessary for him to lighten another.

THE sickly man, made serene again, had gone away. Clerambault, through a slight intoxication, was feeling giddy. He kept quiet, tasting the strange happiness which a soul, personally unfortunate, experiences in feeling that it participates in the happiness of other souls, present or to come. Happiness, the profound instinct, the fullness of the creature. . . . All creatures aspire to it, but it is not the same for all. Some wish to have ; for others, to see is to have, and for others to believe is to see. And all of them only form a chain which this instinct ties again ; from those who only seek their good, that of their family, that of their nation, to the one who embraces millions of creatures, all the total happiness. And such an one who has not the happiness, brings it to others, after the manner of Clerambault, and does not suspect it ; for the others see already the light on his forehead, while his eyes are still in the shadow.

The look of the young man came to reveal to the poor Clerambault his unknown riches. And the consciousness of the divine message with which he was charged re-established his lost union with men. They only oppose it because he was their forward

pioneer, their Christopher Columbus who persists on the desert ocean, to open to them the way to the New World. They insult him, but they follow him. For all true thought, whether understood or not, is the vessel launched which tows behind it the souls of the past.

From that day he turned his eyes from the irreparable fact of the war and the dead, to look towards the living and towards the future which is in our hands. However fascinating may be the obsession of those whom we have lost, and whatever melancholy attraction invites us to engulf ourselves with them, we must tear ourselves away from the malignant odours which rise, as at Rome from the Way of the Tombs. March ! Do not stop ! Thou hast not yet right to their repose. Others have need of thee. Look at them down there, those who, like the remains of the Grand Army, creep along while seeking in the gloomy area the effaced road. . . .

Clerambault saw the black pessimism which threatened to overwhelm these young people after the war, and he was transpierced by it. The moral danger was great. The rulers did not worry about it. They were like bad drivers, who urge their horse with lashes of the whip, to make him take a stiff hill at a gallop. The horse reaches the top ; but the road continues, and the horse falls down ; he is foundered for life. . . . With what heart

these young people had rushed to the assault in the first months of the war ! And since then, the ardour had fallen off ; but the beast remained yoked, supported by the shafts ; a fictitious exaltation was kept up around it, its daily ration was watered with magnificent hopes ; and although its alcohol was each day more dead, it could not fall. It did not even complain ? The word of command around the victims, was not to hear ; to be deaf and to lie.

But, one day after another, the tide of the battles left, in ebbing, on the sand, its waifs—mutilated and wounded ; and through them the murmurings of the human ocean were exposed to the light. Those unhappy ones, torn away suddenly from the polypus of which they were a limb, were tossed about in the void, incapable of binding anything together, neither the passions of yesterday nor the dreams of to-morrow. And they wondered in anguish, some obscurely, a small number with a cruel clearness, why they had lived—why one lives. . . .

*“ Since that which is destroyed suffers, and he who destroys does not enjoy and soon is likewise destroyed, tell me what no philosophy knows ; who is pleased, or who is served by the unfortunate life of the universe, which conserves itself to the detriment and by the death of all the creatures which compose it. . . . ”*<sup>1</sup>

It was important to reply, to find for them reasons for living. A man of the age of Clerambault does

<sup>1</sup> Leopardi.

not require them ; he has lived, it suffices him to free his conscience ; it is his public testament. But as for the young people who have before them all their life, it does not suffice them to see the truth on a field of corpses. Whatever the past may be, the future alone counts for them. Clear away the ruins !

From what do they suffer most ? From their suffering itself ? No. From their doubt in the faith to which that suffering was offered in sacrifice. (Would one regret having sacrificed oneself for the wife which one loves, or even for one's child ?) This doubt poisons them ; it takes away from the power to continue on their way, because they are afraid of despair at the end. That is why you are told : "Beware of unsettling the ideal of the Country ! Restore it rather !" —Mockery ! As if one could ever conserve by will a faith which one has lost ! One lies to oneself. And one knows it at the bottom ; this unacknowledged conscience kills courage and joy.

Be brave, and reject the faith in which you do not believe any more ! The trees, in order to become green again, are obliged to strip themselves of their autumn foliage. Of your past illusions make a fire, as the peasants do, of dead leaves ; the new faith of the plant will bud more quickly. It waits. Nature does not die, it changes incessantly its forms. Like her, allow the robe of the past to fall.

Consider well ! Take count of these cruel years ! You have fought, suffered for the Country. And what have you gained ? You have discovered the fraternity of the peoples who fight and who suffer. Has too much been paid ? No, if you allow your heart to speak, if you dare to open it to the new faith which has come to you, when you were not expecting it.

What deceives and what causes despair is when one remains attached to the object which one had at the beginning ; and when one does not believe in it any more, one thinks that all is lost. Now a great action never produces the effect which one intended. And it is so much the better, for nearly always the effect produced exceeds the effect foreseen, and is something quite different. Wisdom is not to part with the wisdom already acquired, but to gather it sincerely along the way. You are not the same men that you were in 1914. Dare to admit it ! Dare to act accordingly ! That will be the principal gain—the only gain perhaps—of the war. . . . But will you really dare ? So many reasons conspire to intimidate you ; the fatigue of those years, the old customs, the fear of the effort to look within yourself, to eliminate what is dead, to affirm what is living. Then there is that strange superstitious respect for what is ancient, a bored preference for what one knows already even for what is bad, even for what causes one to return to the chalked-out rut,

rather than to seek to open for oneself a new road : is not the ideal of the majority of the French people to receive from infancy, their plan of life ready-made, and not to change it ! . . . Ah ! would that the war which has to such an extent destroyed your firesides would at least constrain you to leave your ruins, to found other homes, to seek other truths !



It was not the desire to break with the past and enter unknown territory which was wanting on the part of many of those young people. They would much rather have preferred to burn the halting-place. They had hardly left the old world when they aspired to take possession of the new. Without delay. No half measures ! Clear solutions. Either they acquiesced in servitude of the past, or Revolution.

Thus Moreau understood it. Of the hope of Clerambault in a social revolution he made a certainty ; and in his exhortations to conquer patiently, day by day, the truth, he understood an appeal to violent action to be carried out immediately.

He conducted Clerambault to two or three clubs of young intellectuals, of revolutionary spirit. They were not numerous ; and here and there one found the same people. The powers that be had them watched, which gave them greater importance, than they would have had without such surveillance. Miserable government, armed to the teeth, disposing of millions of bayonets, of a police, of a docile legal system, good for doing everything—and always uneasy, not being able to permit a dozen

free spirits to assemble together to express a judgment on it ! They had not, however, the manner of conspirators, They did everything possible to be persecuted ; but their activities confined themselves to words. What else could they do ? They were separated from the mass of their companions in thought, whom the machine of the war sucked in, whom the army engulfed, and who were only restored when they were of no more use. Of the youth of Europe, what remained in the rear ? There were the "embusqués," who accepted too often the most tedious jobs, to enable the others to fight, in order that it might be forgotten that they did not fight. Apart from these the representatives—*rarinantes*—of the young generation, who remained in civil life, were those who had been discharged from the army, for grave reasons of health, and a few waifs of the war, like Moreau. In these mutilated or undermined bodies the souls were lighted candles in a room with broken windows ; they consumed themselves, twisted themselves, and smoked ; a breath threatened to put them out. But, accustomed not to take life into account they were only the more ardent.

They made sudden jumps from extreme pessimism to extreme optimism. Those violent oscillations of the barometer did not always correspond with the course of events. The pessimism explained itself only too well. The optimism was more

astounding. It would have been difficult to give reasons for it. They were a handful, without action, without the means of action ; and each day seemed to inflict a new contradiction to their ideas. But the worse things went, the more satisfied they seemed to be. They had the optimism of the worst, that mad religious faith of fanatical and oppressed minorities ; they must have the Antichrist, in order that Christ may return ; they await the new order, and also the crimes of the old order which lead it to ruin ; and they do not worry if they themselves will be ruined, and with them their dreams. The young intransigents, whom Clerambault saw, were mainly occupied in hindering the partial realisation of their dreams in the old order. All or nothing. To make the world less bad ? Tuts ! Make it perfect, or may it burst ! That was a mysticism of the great disorder of the Revolution ; it inflamed the brains of those who believed least in the dreams of the religions. . . . Religious they were, more than the Church people. . . . O foolish human species ! Always this faith in the absolute, which leads to the same enthusiasm, but to the same disasters, the madmen of the war of nations, the madmen of the war of classes, and the madmen of peace ! One would say that humanity when it pushed its nose out of the burning mud of the Creation, got sunstroke, from which it has not recovered, and which has caused it to fall back into a hot fever. . . .

Or rather, should we see in these mystics of the Revolution, forerunner signs of the change which is hatching in the species—which may hatch for centuries—and which, perhaps, may never hatch out? For there are, in nature, thousands of latent possibilities for a single realisation in the time given to our humanity. And it is perhaps this obscure feeling of that which could be, and which will not be, which sometimes gives to the revolutionary mysticism another form, more rare and more tragic—exalted pessimism, the feverish allurements of sacrifice. How many of those Revolutionaries have you seen, secretly convinced of the crushing power of the evil, and of the fatal defeat of their faith, who are intoxicated with love for the conquered beauty . . .

“ . . . sed victa Catoni . . . ”

and filled with the hope of dying for her, of destroying and being destroyed! How many aspirations the crushed Commune has given birth to not to end in its victory, but in a like encrushing! It seems that, in the heart of the most materialistic, there watches always a remnant of the eternal flame of hope rebuffed, denied, affirmed even, of the imperishable refuge of all the oppressed in a better future.

These young men received Clerambault with an affectionate esteem. They tried to annex him; some innocently, reading in his thoughts what they

themselves thought ; others, convinced that the honest old *bourgeois*, whose heart up till then was his sole guide, generous but insufficient, would allow himself to be instructed by their firm science, and would learn, like them, to follow to the extreme end the logical consequences of the principles set out. Clerambault defended himself feebly, for he knew that nothing can be done to convince a young man who has just incrustated himself in a system. At this time of life, discussion is in vain. One can act on him in the earlier years, when, as it were, the hermit-crab is looking for his shell ; and later, something may be done when the shell begins to wear and be uncomfortable.

But when the coat is new, one can only leave him with it : the coat is according to his measure. If he grows taller—or grows smaller—he will take another. Do not force anyone ! But let no person force us !

No one among these people—at least to begin with—dreamt of forcing Clerambault. But his thought was strangely dressed according to the fashion of his hosts. What unforeseen echoes it had in their mouths ! Clerambault allowed his friends to speak and he hardly spoke. When he turned from being amongst them, he was troubled and a little ironical :

“ And is that my thought ? ” he wondered.

Ah ! how different it is to communicate one's

soul to other men ! Impossible perhaps. And who knows ? . . . Nature is wiser than we. . . . Perhaps it is a good thing . . .

To express *all* one's thought ! Can one do so ? Ought one to do so ? One has arrived at it slowly, painfully, by a series of trials ; it is like the formula of the fragile equilibrium among the interior elements. Change the elements, their proportions, their nature, the formula is of no use, and has other effects. Throw your thought into another, suddenly and entirely, and it runs the risk of injuring him. There are even cases when, if the other understood, he could be killed by it. But prudent nature has taken its precautions. The other does not understand you, he does not wish to understand you, his instinct forbids it ; he only accepts of your thought what clashes with his ; and thus, as at billiards, the ball rebounds ; but it is less easy to foresee towards what point of the cloth. ( Men do not listen with a ✓ pure mind, but with their passions and their temperament. Of that which you give them, each one takes what is good for him and rejects the rest. The obscure instinct of defence ! The mind does not open itself to new thought. It acts as sentry at door. And only what it wishes is allowed to enter. The high thought of the sages, of such as Jesus and Socrates—what has been done with it ? In their time, Jesus and Socrates were killed. Twenty centuries after they have been made gods of ; it is

another way of killing them ; their thought is transferred to the eternal kingdom. } If it were allowed to be accomplished in the world here below, the world would be finished. They themselves knew it. And the greater part of their soul is not, perhaps, what they have said, but what they have not said. Pathetic eloquence of the silences of Jesus, beautiful veil of the symbols and of the ancient myths, made to lead quietly the feeble and fearful eyes ! Too often the word which for one is life is for another death, or what is worse, murder. What is to be done, if one's hand is full of truths ? Scatter the seed at random ? But the seed of thought may give rise to weeds or poison ! . . .

Now then, do not tremble ! Thou art not the master of destiny ; but thou art also destiny, thou art one of its voices. Speak then ! It is thy law. Express all thy thought, but express it with kindness. Be like a good mother, to whom it is not given to make men of her children, but who teaches them patiently to become so, if they wish. One cannot make others free, in spite of them, or without them ; and even if that were possible, what good purpose would it serve ? If they do not make themselves free themselves, to-morrow they will be slaves again. Give the example and say : " Here is the way ! You see, one can make oneself free . . . "

IN spite of his effort to act bravely and leave the rest to the gods, it was fortunate that Clerambault was not able to see all the consequences of his thought. His thought aspired to the reign of peace. And very probably it would contribute to quite a considerable extent, to the unchaining of social battles. Like all true pacifism—however paradoxical it may seem. For it is a condemnation of the present.

But Clerambault did not suspect that formidable forces would, one day, make use of his name. By an opposed effect, his mind achieved among those young men more harmony, in reacting against their violence. He felt the more the price of life because they made it so cheap. In that they did not differ much from the nationalists whom they wished to fight. They respected life much less than the idea. (That is, says one, a greatness in man. . . .)

All the same, Clerambault was very pleased to meet a man who loved life for life. A comrade of Moreau, much wounded like himself, named Gillot ; in civil life, a young commercial designer for industries. A shell had interlarded him from top to bottom ; he had lost a leg and a tympanum was broken. But Gillot reacted more energetically.



against his lot than Moreau. This little dark man had quick eyes, in which burned, in spite of all, a flame of cheerfulness. In agreement with Moreau regarding the nonsense of the war and the crime of society, he had seen the same facts, the same men, but not with the same eyes ; and the two young men were often in debate.

"Yes," said Gillot one day when Moreau had just recounted to Clerambault a lugubrious memory of the life of the trenches, "it was even so. . . . Only there is something worse ; it is that it did not matter at all to us."

Moreau protested angrily.

"Except yourself, perhaps, and if you wish it, two or three here and there. But the others ! . . . They ended by taking no more notice of it."

He continued, to stop a new protest :

"I do not say that, my boy, to make us worth something. It does not matter ! I say it because it is so. . . . Do you see—(addressing himself to Clerambault)—those who return from there and who put *it* in the books, indeed say what they feel ; but they feel much more than ordinary mortals, because they are artists. Everything galls them. As for the rest of us, we are bored. It is at its worst, at this moment, when I am thinking about it. When you read here one of those histories which makes your hair stand on end, or gives you the nausea, you miss the best of it : fellows who smoke their pipe,

tell wonderful stories, or think of something else. It must indeed be so ! Otherwise one would die. . . . All the same, the human animal has a facility for adapting itself to everything ! . . . It would find means of prospering, at the bottom of a refuse heap. True, one is disgusted with oneself ! I have felt thus, I who speak to you. You need not wonder how I passed my time, like the boy here, thinking about my cranium. I found it like everybody else, what one had made it, idiotic. But then all life is idiotic, is it not ? . . . One did what there was to do, as much as was necessary, while awaiting the end. . . . The end ? One end or another. My end, that of my skin, or that of the war. It is always an end. . . . Meanwhile, one lives ; one eats, one sleeps, one ' chie ' . . . Pardon ! One must say things. . . . And the result of all that, monsieur, do you wish to know it ? Well, it is that one does not love life. One does not love it enough. You were very right to say it, in one of your articles ; it is famous, life ! Only, they are not many, those who seem to think so just now. Not many who are alive. Waiting for the great sleep. They say : ' We are thus all in bed. There is no need to stir.'

" No, one does not love life enough ! One does not learn to love it. Everything possible is done to make you disgusted with it. Ever since childhood one sings of death, or rather of those who are dead. History, the catechism, '*To die for one's Country.*' . . .

It is either popery or patriotism. And then, life becomes a plague. This life of to-day, one would say that it was arranged so as to make it as troublesome as possible. No more initiative. All is mechanised. With that, no order. One no longer does work. One does bits of work. One does not know how it comes about, and more often than not it does not come about. It is like being put in a barrel, piled up by chance. One does not know why. One does not know why one lives. One lives. One does not advance. There are, in the night of time, our grandparents, who, it is said, took the Bastille for us. Then it would appear according to those jokers—those who hold the handle—that there is nothing more for us to do to-day, since this is Paradise. Is it not written on our monuments? One feels quite well that it is not true, that there is before us another storm gathering, another Revolution. . . . But that which has taken place has succeeded so badly! And there is so little clear! No, one has not confidence, one does not see his road, there is no one to show us above those toad-ponds, something high, something beautiful. . . . They do all they can, now, to pack us up; Right, Justice, Liberty. . . . But that trick is played out. . . . One can die for that. One never refuses to die. . . . But to live, that is another thing!” . . .

“And now?” asked Clerambault.

"Ah ! now, now, that one cannot go back, I think : ' If it had all to be done again.' "

" When have you changed ? "

" That is the most curious thing of all ! As soon as I was wounded. Hardly had I taken one leg out of life than I wished to put it back again. How comfortable it was in its old place. And one did not suspect it. Idiot. . . . Look here, I see myself still, when I had recovered consciousness, in a ravaged field, which was still more gutted than the bodies which lay, entangled, like a game of sticks ; the earth, which was sticky itself, seemed to bleed. Complete night. I felt nothing at first. I was freezing. I was stiff. . . . What was the bit which exactly was missing ? I was in no hurry to make up the inventory. I was afraid what would come out of it. I did not wish to budge. One thing was sure. I was living. Perhaps for not more than a moment. I must be careful not to lose it ! . . . And I saw in the sky a little rocket. What it signified I did not bother about. But the curve, the stem and the flash of fire. . . . I cannot tell you how beautiful it was. . . . I gathered it with my eyes. . . . I saw myself a child again, near la Samaritaine, one night on which there were fireworks, on the Seine. I looked at this child as if it were some other child which caused me amusement and pity. And then, I have thought that it was good nevertheless to be planted in life, to grow, and to have something,

someone, no matter who, to love. What, only this rocket ! And then the pain came, and I began to scream. And then I put back my head into the bottom of the hole. . . . After, there was the ambulance. It was no longer good to be alive. The pain was a dog which was gnawing your marrow. . . . As well to remain in the hole ! . . . And, nevertheless, even then, especially then, what a paradise it seemed to you to live as formerly, merely to live, to live without pain, as one lives every day. And one does not remark it ! Without pain. . . . Without pain. . . . And to live ! But it is a dream ! When it stopped. . . . A minute of peace to feel only the taste of the air on the tongue and the body so light after one has suffered. . . . Cristi ! . . . And the whole life formerly was thus ! And one did not suspect it ! . . . Good God, what a fool one is to wait till one is deprived of it before understanding it ! And when one loves it at last and asks pardon for not having appreciated it, it replies "Too late !"

"It is never too late," said Clerambault.

GILLOT was quite willing to believe it. This educated workman was better armed for the battle than Moreau, or even than Clerambault. Nothing beat him down for long. One falls, one rises again, one takes one's revenge. . . . At the bottom, he thought of the obstacles which obstruct the future.

One will have them !

And he was ready to march, on the only leg which remained to him—against them as soon as possible. The sooner the better. For he also was, like the others, a devotee of the Revolution. He found the means of accommodating it with his optimism, which saw beforehand, the Revolution realised in sweetness. He was without rancour.

However, it was not necessary to trust in him. These democratic natures reserve such surprises ! They are so malleable and ready to change. . . . Clerambault heard him talking one day with a comrade called Lagneau, home on leave from the front, about smashing everything to bits when the soldiers returned, at the end of the war, and even before. The man of the people of France, who is often charming, quick, alert, running before your thought before you have time to express it correctly—great God ! How he forgets ! What one has said, what

he has said, what he has seen, what he has believed, and what he has wished . . . But he is always sure of what he wishes, what he says, what he sees, what he believes. Gillot, with Lagneau, developed tranquilly contrary arguments to those which he supported with Clerambault the day before. And it was not only his ideas which changed, but it was his temperament. In the morning nothing violent enough for his need of action and of demolition ! In the evening he only thought of a petty commerce, of gaining a great deal, of eating well, of rearing his brood, and bothering about nothing else.

And if they called themselves quite sincerely internationalists, there were very few among those poilus who had not conserved the old French prejudices regarding superiority of race—not spiteful, but good-humoured, and firmly anchored—with regard to the rest of the world, enemies and allies ; and in their own country even, with regard to those from the other provinces, or if they were provincials, with regard to those from Paris.

They were not grouchers, but courageous, always ready to march, like Gillot, capable certainly of making a Revolution, and then of unmaking it, and then . . . tra-la-la . . . to send everything to the ground and to refer it to the will of the first adventurer.—The foxes of politics know it only too well !

{ The best tactics to kill revolution is when the hour is come, to allow it to pass while amusing the people.

The hour seemed very near at hand. A year before the end of the war, there were in both camps, several months, several weeks, in which the infinite patience of the martyred peoples seemed on the point of cracking, and in which a great outcry was going to shout, "Enough!" For the first time the impression of a bloody fraud was spread among them. How can one not understand the indignation of the men of the people, who witnessed the unbridled gambling with millions in the war when before the war their masters were parsimonious about several hundred thousand francs for social reform? More than all the speeches certain figures had the power to exasperate them. It had been calculated that it took about 75,000 francs to kill a man! And for the same sum which made ten millions of dead one could have made ten millions of capitalists. . . . The most ignorant took note of the enormous riches of the world, and of the monstrous use to which it was put. Shameless waste, for an illusory end; and the worst meanness; from one end of Europe to another this vermin which fattens on death, the profiteers of the war, the robbers of corpses. . . .

Ah! thought those young people, do not talk to us any more about the struggle between democracies and autocracies! For it is the same dirt under all these 'cracies. And in all, the war has marked out for the vengeance of the peoples, the ruling classes,



the unworthy bourgeoisie, political, financial, intellectual, who in a single century of absolute power have brought on the world more extortions, crimes, ruins and follies, than plagues, kings and churches have done in ten centuries. . . .

Therefore, when the axe of Lenin and Trotsky, the heroic wood-cutters, resounded in the distance, in the forest, many oppressed hearts trembled with hope. And, in every country, more than one prepared his axe. As regards the ruling classes, from one end of Europe to another, they stood alert against the common danger. There was no need of negotiations to agree about that matter. Their instinct had spoken. The press of the bourgeoisies, enemies of Germany, tacitly gave carte blanche to the Kaiser, to strangle Russian liberty, which menaced social injustice, in which all equally lived. In the absurdity of their hate, they ill-concealed their joy at seeing Prussian militarism—the monster which was bound afterwards to turn itself on them—execute vengeance on those great rebels. And naturally, they attracted also, among the masses which would suffer, and among the small number of independent spirits, admiration for those who opposed the universe—for the Excommunicated.

The boiler seethed. To stop it, the governments of Europe had hermetically sealed it, and seated themselves upon it. The stupid ruling bourgeoisie, keeping up the fire, were alarmed at sinister

rumblings. They attributed the revolt of the Elements to a few unrestrained orators, to mysterious intrigues, to the gold of the enemy, to the pacifists. And they did not see—what a child would have seen—that the first thing to do to prevent an explosion, was to put out the fire. The god of all the powers whatever might be their label, empires or republics, was the fist—Force, begloved, masked, painted, but firm and sure of itself. And it became also, by the law of the surf, the faith of the oppressed. It was a grievous battle between two contrary pressures. Where the metal was worn thin—as in Russia at the first—the boiler had burst. Where the lid was less able to hold—as in the neutral countries—the burning steam escaped, hissing. A deceitful calm reigned in the countries at war, upon which oppression weighed. To the oppressors, this calm seemed to confer right ; armed against the enemy, they were not less so against their own citizens. The machine of war has always two ends, before and behind ; the lid fits well, made of the best steel, and the nuts screwed in. It will not come off. No. Take care that the whole thing does not burst, all at once !

Compressed like the others, Clerambault saw the revolt gathering around him. He understood it, he even believed it fatal ; but that was not a reason for loving it. He did not practise *l'Amor Fati*. To understand is sufficient. The tyrant has not the right to love.

THOSE young men were not sparing of their ideas. And they were astonished that Clerambault did not shew more enthusiasm for the new idol which came to them from the North ; the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They did not embarrass themselves with timorous scruples and half-measures to make the world happy, according to their plan—if it was not his. They decreed right away the supression of all liberties which could be opposed to them. The decayed bourgeoisie was deprived of the right of meeting, of the right to vote, of the freedom of the press.

“ Very well ! ” said Clerambault. “ That being so it will become the new Proletariat. Oppression changes place.”

“ That will only be for a time. The last oppression which will kill oppression.”

“ Yes, always the war for Right and for Liberty ; always the last war, which must kill war. And meanwhile, it keeps all the better for it, and Right as well as Liberty are trampled under foot.”

of Euzy protested angrily, against the comparison. themselves only infamy in the war and in those who keeping up

“Nevertheless,” said Clerambault gently, some of you have fought and almost all of you have believed in it. . . . But no, do not protest ! The feeling which urged you had its nobleness also. You were shewn a crime, and you threw yourselves at it to crush it. Your ardour was beautiful. Only, you thought there was only one crime, and that once the world had been purged of it, it would become innocent again, as in the Golden Age. I witnessed this strange ingenuousness at the time of the Dreyfus case. All the good people of Europe—(I was one of them)—seemed never to have heard that an innocent person could have been, before then, unjustly condemned. Their life was overturned by it. They moved the universe to cleanse it of this iniquity. . . . Alas ! when the washing was done—(it was not even finished, the cleansers, and the one whose character was to be cleared, were discouraged in the midst of their task)—the world was as black as before. It seems that man cannot grasp the ensemble of human misery. He is too much afraid of seeing the immensity of the evil ; in order not to be overwhelmed by it he fixes himself on a sole point, he localises there all the evil of the world, and forbids himself to look around. All that is easily understood, it is human, my friends. But it is necessary to be more brave. The truth is, the evil is everywhere ; it is with the enemy, and it is with us. You have discovered it little by little in our State. With

the same passion with which you incarnated in the enemy the universal Evil, you are going to turn now against your governments, in which you see the tares. And if ever you recognise that those tares are also in you—(as it is to be feared that after the revolutions break out the lovers of justice will find themselves, at the end, with hands and heart defiled, without knowing how)—you will become incensed against yourselves, with a dark despair. . . . Grown-up children, when will you leave off wishing for the absolute ? ”

They would have been able to reply to him that it is necessary to wish for the absolute to achieve the real. Thought can amuse itself with shades of difference. Action does not permit it. It is all the one, or all the other. Would that Clerambault would choose between them and their adversaries ! No other choice possible. . . .

Yes, Clerambault understood it. No other choice possible, on the plan of action. Here, all is determined beforehand. Just as unjust victory leads fatally to revenge which will be unjust in its turn, just as capitalistic oppression will lead to the proletarian revolution, which will be oppressive, in its turn. It is an endless chain. There is there a bronze *Diké*, which recognises the mind, which can even honour it like a law of the universe. But the heart does not accept it. The heart refuses to submit to it. Its mission is to break the law of eternal

war. Will it ever be able to do it? . . . Who knows? In any case, it is clear that its hope, its wish is out of the natural order. Its mission is of supernatural order, and properly *religious*.

But Clerambault, who was penetrated with it, did not dare to acknowledge it to himself. He did not dare, at least, to confess this word : *religious*. This word the religions—(so little religious)—have to-day discredited.

If Clerambault had not yet reached complete clearness in his thought, his young friends had good reason for not doing so. Besides, had they seen it, they would never have understood it. They did not bear with a man who condemned the present condition of things as bad and deadly, and refused the most energetic means to suppress it. They were not wrong from their point of view, which was that of immediate action. The field of the Spirit is more vast ; the battles which it yields up embrace a large space ; it does not compromise them with bloody skirmishes. And even admitting that the means extolled by his friends were the most efficacious, Clerambault did not accept this axiom of action, that " the end justifies the means." He believed on the contrary that the means are still more important to true progress than the end. . . . The end ? . . . Is there ever an end ?

But they were irritated against this too complex and diffuse thought. It kept them in a state of dangerous animosity, which had begun five years before, among the working classes against the intellectuals. Certainly those latter had only done too much to merit it. How far off they were from the

time when the men of thought marched at the head of Revolutions ! At present they were joined with all the forces of reaction. And even the small number of those who remained apart from the majority, while blaming the errors of the reactionaries, shewed themselves incapable, like Clerambault, of renouncing their individualism, which had saved them once, and which kept them prisoners to-day—incapable of incorporating themselves with the new movements of the masses. It was not a far step from the observation made by the revolutionaries to the declaration of the downfall of the intellectuals. The pride of the working class caste which asserted itself in articles, and speeches, until it might be able, as in Russia, to manifest itself in acts, maintained that the intellectuals obeyed servilely the proletarian masters. It was remarkable that several intellectuals were among the most ardent in asserting this abasement of the confraternity. They would have liked to have it understood that they did not belong to it. They forgot that they did ! . . . Moreau did not forget it. He was only the more bitter in repudiating the class, of which the Nessus shirt clung to his skin. He did so with extreme violence.

He now shewed strangely aggressive feelings towards Clerambault ; during discussion he interrupted him, without politeness, with a sort of irritated and ironical sharpness. One would have thought that he sought to wound him.



Clerambault did not take offence. He was full of pity for him ; he knew what he suffered, and he could imagine the bitterness of a young life sacrificed, to whom the moral nourishment—patience and resignation—with which stomachs of fifty years accommodate themselves, was of no use.

One evening Moreau had shewn himself particularly disagreeable, but nevertheless insisted on seeing Clerambault home, as if he could not decide to leave him. He was taciturn, and frowning, while walking beside him. Clerambault stopped a second, and, taking him in a friendly way by the arm, said, with a smile :

“ My poor boy, things are not well then.”

Moreau, listening, took hold of himself again, and asked dryly what shewed that things were not going well with him.

“ Because you were spiteful to-night,” replied Clerambault, good-naturedly.

Moreau protested.

“ But yes. You took so much trouble to hurt me ! . . . Oh, a little, a very little only. . . . I know well that you really do not wish to do so. . . . And when a man like you seeks to create suffering, he suffers himself. . . . Is that not true ? ”

“ Excuse me,” said Moreau. “ It is true, I suffered to see that you do not believe in our action.”

“ And you ? ” asked Clerambault.

Moreau did not understand.

"And you?" repeated Clerambault. "Do you believe in it?"

"Yes, I believe in it!" cried Moreau angrily.

"Why, no," said Clerambault softly.

Moreau was on the point of flying into a passion, then becoming quieter said :

"But yes!"

Clerambault had resumed walking.

"All right," said he, "that concerns you. You know better than I what you think."

They continued to walk without speaking. After several minutes Moreau, seizing Clerambault by the arm, said to him :

"How did you know?"

His resistance was broken. He confessed the despair hidden under the aggressive wish to believe and to act. He was corroded with pessimism. A natural consequence of an excessive idealism, the illusions of which had been cruelly mortified. The religious souls of other times were very calm ; they placed the Kingdom of God in a far-away place which no happening could reach. But as for those of to-day which install it on earth, in the work of human reason and of love, when life slaps their dreams in the face, life becomes a horror to them. There were days in which Moreau could have opened his veins. Humanity seemed to him like a fruit which was rotting ; he saw with despair defeat, and

failure, inscribed from the beginning in the destinies of the species—the worm in the flower ; and he could not bear the idea of this absurd and tragic Destiny, from which men will never escape. Like Clerambault, he felt the poison of intelligence in his veins ; but whereas Clerambault had surmounted the crisis—only acknowledging the danger in the disturbance of the mind, and not in its essence—Moreau was possessed with the idea that the poison was constitutive of the intelligence. His exasperated imagination could only work in such a way as to torture him ; it showed him thought as a malady, which brands the human species with its indelible waste. He pictured to himself beforehand the cataclysms towards which it was going : had he not seen already the spectacle of reason staggering with pride before the forces which science had put it in possession of—those demons of nature which enslaved to it the magical formulas conquered by chemistry—and, losing its way through the too sudden acquisition of this power, turning it to suicide !

Still, however, the youth of Moreau refused to remain under the weight of those terrors. Act at all costs, so as not to remain alone with them ! Do not prevent us from acting ! Encourage us rather !

“ My friend,” said Clerambault, “ one ought not to urge others to dangerous action unless one acts himself. I cannot suffer the agitators even though

they be sincere, who urge others to martyrdom, without giving the example. There is only one type of revolutionary really sacred ; that is the Crucified. But very few men are made for the aureole of the cross. The evil is that one always assigns to oneself superhuman, inhuman, duties. It is unwholesome for the common stock of men to strive towards *Uebersensheit*, and that can only be for them a source of useless suffering. But each man may aspire to shed in his little circle the inner light—order, peace, kindness. And it is there that happiness lies.”

“That is not enough for me,” said Moreau. “That leaves too much room for doubt. We must have all or nothing.”

“Yes, your revolution no longer leaves any room for doubt. O hearts hard and dry, geometrical brains ! All or nothing. No more shades of difference ! And what is life without shades of difference. It is in those that its beauty and goodness lies. Fragile beauty, feeble goodness, everywhere feebleness.

“To love, to aid. From day to day, and step by step. The world neither transforms itself by blows of force, nor by coups de grâce, entirely, suddenly. But second by second, it changes endlessly ; and the most humble who feels it, takes part in the infinite. Patience ! A single injustice removed does not deliver humanity. But it lights up one day. Others

will come, other lights. Other days. Each one brings its sun. Would you wish to stop it?"

"We cannot wait," said Moreau. "We have not the time. The day in which we live sets devouring problems. We must solve them at once. If we are not the masters of them, we will be the victims of them. . . . We? . . . Not only our bodies. They are already victims. But all that we love, that which holds us still to life; the hope in the future, the salvation of humanity. . . . Look at all that which urges us, the agonising questions for those who will come to-morrow for those who have children. This war is not ended, and it is too evident that it already sows new wars by its crimes and its lies. For what does one rear one's children? For what will they grow up? Is it in order to be offered up to similar butcheries? What solutions are possible? One can name them quickly. . . . Leave those mad nations, this old mad continent and emigrate? Whither? Does there remain on the globe five arpents of land, where free, honest men can take shelter?—Enlist?—You will see that it is necessary to decide! Either for the nation or for the Revolution. If not, what remains? Non-resistance? Do you wish that? It has no sense unless one has faith, a religious faith; otherwise, it is an act of resignation like that of sheep which are killed. But the greatest number, alas! decide for nothing, prefer not to think, turn aside their eyes

from the future, make themselves believe that what they have seen and suffered will never happen again. . . . That is why we ought to decide for them, and with their consent or by force, make them take the step, to save them in spite of themselves. A Revolution is what is willed by some men for all humanity."

"I should not like very much," said Clerambault, that another should will for me, and it would not please me any better to will for another. I would prefer to help each one to be free and not to cramp the liberty of others. But I know that I ask too much."

"You demand the impossible," said Moreau. "When one begins to will, one no longer stops on the road. There are only two kinds of men ; those who will too much—Lenin and all the great men (there are fully two dozen in all the history of the centuries !)—and those who will too little, those who do not know how to will anything : those who are all the others ; those are us, I am one ! . . . You have seen it too well ! . . . I only will through despair." . . .

"Why despair ?" said Clerambault. "The destiny of man is made each day, and no one knows it ; it is what we are ; to be discouraged is to discourage it."

But Moreau said, with sadness :

"We will not have the power, we will not have the power. . . . Do you think I do not see what

poor chances of success we have, in a Revolution under present conditions, after the destructions, the economic annihilations, the demoralisation, the mortal lassitude, caused by these four years of war ? ”

And he admitted :

“ I lied, the first time I saw you, when I pretended that all my comrades felt suffering and revolt like us. Gillot has rightly told you ; we are only a small number. The others are, for the most part, good people, but feeble, feeble ! They judge things well enough, but sooner than throw their heads against a wall, they prefer not to think of it, they revenge themselves by laughter. Ah ! that French laugh, our richness and our ruin ! How fine it is, but what a prey it offers to the oppressors ! . . . ‘ Let them sing as long as they pay,’ as the Italian said. . . . ‘ They may laugh provided they die ! ’—And then, this terrible habit, of which Gillot spoke to you. To whatever absurd and painful conditions one wishes to restrict man, provided that they are prolonged, and that he is one of a herd, he accustoms himself to all, he accustoms himself to heat, to cold, to death, or to crime. All the power of resistance he uses to adapt himself to it ; and then he sinks into a corner, without budging, for fear that, if he changed, he would awaken the deadened suffering. There is such a *fatigue* weighs on us ! When the armies return, they will have one desire ; to forget and sleep.”

“ And Lagneau, that excited man, who speaks of smashing everything ? ”

“ Lagneau ? I have known him since the commencement of the war. I have seen him, by turns, royalist, revengist, annexationist, internationalist, socialist, anarchist, bolshevist, and I-don't-give-a-damnist. He will end by becoming a reactionary. They will finally send him to be wounded by the enemy, whichever enemy it will please our government to choose to-morrow . . . from among our enemies or among our friends of to-day. . . . The people are of our opinion ? Yes, and of the opinion of others. The people are of all opinions in turn.”

“ You are the revolutionary, through discouragement,” said Clerambault, laughing.

“ There are many of them among us.”

“ Gillot, however, has come out of the war, more optimistic than before.”

“ Gillot can forget,” said Moreau bitterly. “ I do not envy him his happiness.”

“ You must not spoil it for him,” said Clerambault. “ Help Gillot, he has need of you.”

“ Of me ? ” said Moreau incredulously.

“ To be strong he has need that one believe in his strength. Believe.”

“ Can one believe at will ? ”

“ You know something about it ! . . . Is not the answer ? . . . But one believes through love.”



“ By the love of those who believe ? ”

“ Is it not always through love, and only through love, that one believes ? ”

Moreau was touched. His intellectual youth, parched and dried up by the thirst of knowledge, suffered like the rest of the bourgeois class, from the want of fraternal affection. Human communion is banished from the education of to-day. That vital feeling, continuously driven back, was awakened with mistrust, in the trenches, those ditches of living flesh—suffering, heaped together. But one was afraid to give oneself up to it. The common hardness of heart, the fear of affectation, the irony, sheathed the heart. Since the illness of Moreau, the envelope of pride had less power. Clerambault had no difficulty in breaking it. The good thing about this man was that when one came into contact with him, his pride dissolved, for he had none ; and one showed himself to him, as he showed himself to you, with his true nature, his weaknesses and his cries, which a false pride tries to stifle. Moreau, who had recognised at the front without admitting it too much, the superiority of men of a socially inferior rank, among his companions or his officers, shewed for Gillot a sympathy to which he was glad that Clerambault made appeal. Clerambault formulated for him his secret desire that another had need of him.

And Clerambault whispered to Gillot to be op-

timistic enough for two, to support Moreau. Thus both gained strength in the need of assisting one another. The great principle of life :

“ He who gives, has.”

In whatever time one may live, no matter what the disasters may be, nothing is lost, as long as a spark of virile friendship remains in the soul of the race. Revive it ! Bring together the solitary hearts which feel the cold ! May one of the fruits of this war of the nations be the fusion of the élite of the classes, the union of the two youths—the world of manual work and that of thought, which ought, in the long run, to give new strength to the future. ✓

But if the means of uniting is not that one of the two may want to dominate the other, neither is it that one prefers to be dominated. It was on this point, however, that the young intellectuals of these revolutionary groups showed a strange pride. Doctrinally, they snubbed Clerambault in the name of this principle that the intellect ought to be placed at the service of the proletariat. . . . “ *Dienen, dienen !* ” . . . the final word of the proud Wagner. It is also the motto of a disappointed pride. They wish either to be masters or servants.

“ In this world ” (thought Clerambault) “ it is very rare to find good people, who wish, plainly, to be my equals. If one must renounce one tyranny for another tyranny, I prefer that which keeps the bodies of Æsop and Epictetus slaves, but leaves their

spirits free, to that which promises us material liberty and slavery of the soul." . . .

This intolerance made him feel his incapacity to bind himself to a party, whatever it might be. Between two opposed parties, the Revolution and the war, he could affirm — (he did it frankly) — his preference for the one ; the Revolution ; for it alone offered a hope of Spring ; and the other killed the future. But to prefer a party did not mean that he was alienating his independence of mind. It is the error and abuse of democracies to wish that all may have the same duties and be put to the same tasks. In a progressive community the duties are many. While the main part of the army fights to secure an immediate step forward, others ought to maintain the eternal values, above the conquerors of to-morrow as of yesterday, for they go beyond all, in enlightening all ; their light projects itself along the road, far beyond the smoke of the battle. Clerambault had allowed himself to be blinded for too long a time by the smoke, to plunge again, amongst it in a new battle. But in this world of blind people the pretension of seeing seems to be an indecency, and perhaps a crime.

He had just authenticated this ironical truth in an interview in which these little Saint Justs had taught him his lesson, in comparing him impertinently enough to the "astrologer who allowed himself to fall to the bottom of a well."

. . . "They said, 'Poor creature, if your eye,  
What lies beneath can hardly spy,  
Think you your gaze can pierce the sky?' "

And as he was not devoid of humour, he found some justness in the comparison. Yes, he belonged somewhat to the confraternity . . .

. . . "Those whom phantoms alarm,  
While some serious harm  
Threatens them or their farm."

"But what? Does your Republic think of dispensing with astronomers, as the other, the first, had no need of chemists? Or, do you expect to mobilise them? We will then have the chance of falling in company to the bottom of the well! Is that what you wish? Eh! I do not say no if it is only a question of sharing your lot. But to share your hates!"

"You have indeed your own!" said one of those young men to him.

And just at that moment another who had entered, with a newspaper in his hand, cried to Clerambault:

"Well now, I congratulate you, the enemy Bertin is dead." . . .

The irascible journalist had just been carried off in a few hours by an infectious pneumonia. For six months he did not cease to pursue with rage all those whom he suspected of seeking for, of wishing for, or even of desiring peace. For step by step, he

had come to regard as sacred, not only the country, but the war. Among those who were exposed to his spitefulness, Clerambault profited by a treatment of favour. Bertin did not forgive anyone whom he attacked who dared to stand up to him. The replies of Clerambault had at first exasperated him. The disdainful silence with which Clerambault then met his invectives made him go beyond all bounds. The swelling-up of his hypertrophied vanity experienced a wound which could only be avenged by the total, definite, encrushing of his adversary. Clerambault appeared to him not only as a personal enemy, but as a public enemy ; and he was out to be the centre of a great pacifist conspiracy, the absurdity of which would have been plain enough in ordinary times, but in those latter times people had no eyes. During the last weeks the polemics of Bertin had gone beyond anything he had written before, in verve and violence ; they were a menace for all those who were convicted or suspect of being participators in the heresy of peace.

Therefore the news of his death was received, in the little meeting, with a noisy satisfaction ; and his funeral oration was made in a style which did not yield anything in energy to any of the masters of that style. Clerambault, immersed in the reading of the paper, scarcely heard it. One of those around him tapped him on the shoulder, and said to him : “ Well now, that will give you pleasure ? ”

Clerambault started :

“Pleasure !” . . . said he . . . “Pleasure !” repeated he.

He took his hat and went out.

He found himself again in the darkness of the street, where the lights were out, on account of an air-raïd warning.

He saw again, in his thought the fine face of a young man, with a warm pale colour, beautiful brown caressing eyes, curly hair, a mobile and laughing mouth and a voice full of melody—Bertin, such as he was, at their first meeting, when they were both seventeen years old. Their long nights together, the dear confidences, the discussions, the dreams. . . . At that time Bertin also dreamed ! Even his practical sense, his precocious irony, did not prevent impossible hopes, generous projects of human regeneration. Ah ! how beautiful the future was to their youthful view ! And how in accord with those charmed minutes, their two hearts united in amorous friendship ! . . .

And that was what life had done with both of them ! This hateful struggle, the insensate fury of Bertin to kick his dreams of other days and the friend who defended them ! And he, he, Clerambault, who had allowed himself to be carried away by the same murderous current, seeking to return blow for blow, to make his opponent bleed. . . . And who, at the first moment, on learning of the

death of his old friend (he had a horror of admitting it to himself), had experienced a feeling of relief ! . . . But what is it that remains with us then ? What frenzy of spitefulness, which turns itself against us ! . . .

Absorbed in these thoughts he had taken the wrong road. He noticed that he was going in a direction away from his house. In the sky, furrowed by the beams of the projectors, one heard great explosions ; the zeppelins over the town, the rumblings of the forts, an aerial battle. Those enraged peoples who rend one another . . . for what end ? To come to the same end as Bertin. To the nothingness which awaited equally all men and all these countries. . . . And those other men, rebels, who talked of other violences, of other murderous idols to oppose to the first, of new gods of carnage, which man invents for himself to try to ennoble his malevolent instincts !

Ah ! God, why do they not perceive the imbecility of their furious agitations, in face of the abyss, where all humanity is injured in each dying man !

How millions of creatures who have only a moment to live, strain themselves to make it infernal, by their atrocious and ridiculous divergencies of ideas ! Fools who massacre one another, for a handful of pence, which are thrown to them, and which are spurious ! All are victims, equally

condemned ; and in place of uniting themselves, they fight among one another ! . . . Unhappy ones ! Give us the kiss of peace. On each forehead which passes I see the sweat of agony. . . .

But a human crowd which he encountered—men and women—cried, shouted with joy :

“ It falls ! One of them falls ! It falls ! The pigs burn ! ”

And the birds of prey, those which hovered above, rejoiced in their hearts, at each handful of death which they sowed on the town. Like gladiators, who run one another through in the arena, for the satisfaction of what invisible Nero.

O, my poor companions in chains !



## PART FIVE

*They also serve who only stand and wait.*

MILTON.

ONCE again he found himself in solitude. But it appeared to him, this time, as he had never seen it before, beautiful and calm, with an aspect of kindness, with affectionate eyes, and very gentle hands which laid on his forehead their soothing freshness. And he knew that, this time, the divine companion had chosen him.

It is not given to every man to be alone. Many groan at being alone, with a secret pride. It is the complaint of the centuries. It proves, unknown to those who complain, that solitude has not chosen them : they are not its familiars. They have pushed open the first door and are struck with cold in the vestibule ; but they have not had the patience to wait their turn to enter ; or else their recriminations have caused them to be shown the door. One does not penetrate to the heart of friendly solitude without the gift of grace, or the benefit of the test piously accepted. One must leave at the

door the dust of the street, the shrill voices of the outside, mean thoughts, egoism, vanity, pitiable revolts of deceived affections, of wounded ambitions. It is necessary that, like the pure Orphic shades, of which the tablets of gold have handed down to us the dying voice, "*the soul flees from the circle of griefs,*" it present itself alone and naked "*to the chill fountain which flows out of the lake of memory.*"

It is the miracle of the Resurrection. He who has just left his mortal skin and thinks he has lost all, discovers that to-day he enters into his true well-being. Not only himself and all else are given back to him ; but he sees that up till then he never had them. Outside, in the crowd, how could he see above the heads of those who surround him ? And as for those nearest to him, who, pressed against his chest, drag him along—it is not possible for him to look at them long in the eyes. One only feels the collisions of the bodies which are crushed, closely wedged in in their common destiny, and which the muddy torrent of the multitude life carries down. Clerambault had never seen his son until he was dead. And the fleeting hour in which he and his daughter understood one another was that in which the bands of the malevolent illusion had just been untied by excess of grief.

Now, that is how he now, in solitude, by the way of successive eliminations, had suppressed (may we say) the passions of the living, and found them

again, in a lucid intimacy. All, not only his own wife, and children, but all those millions of beings, whom he had falsely thought to embrace, in an oratorical love. They all came to picture themselves on a dark background. On the black river of Destiny which bears away humanity, and which he had confounded with humanity, there became visible to him the millions of living waifs, who struggled—men. And each man was himself, to himself alone, a world of joys and sufferings, of dreams and of efforts. And each man was *myself*. I incline myself towards him, and it is myself that I see. “Myself,” says his eyes to me ; and his heart says to me “Myself” ! Ah ! how I understand you ! Now your errors are mine ! Until in the fierceness of those who fight against me, I recognise you, my brother, I am not a dupe : it is myself !

THEN Clerambault began to look at these men, not with his eyes, with the eyes of his head, but with his heart—not with his thought as a pacifist, as a Tolstoyan (*which is another form of folly*), but with the thought of each one, and changing himself in him. And he unveiled those people round about him, those who were the most hostile to him—the intellectuals, the politicians. He perceived their wrinkles, their white hairs, the bitter turn of their mouths, their bent backs, their broken legs. . . . Stretched out, shrivelled, almost falling. . . . How old they had grown in six months ! At first, the exaltation of the battle supported them. But, according as the struggle was prolonged, and as, whatever might be the issue, the ruins became certain, each one had his griefs, and each one was afraid of losing the little—the very little—which remained to him. They did not wish to shew their anguish, they clenched their teeth. . . . What suffering ! And with the most believing, doubt had made its fissure. . . . “Hush ! do not say so. If you tell me so, you kill me.” . . . Clerambault, remembering Madame Mairêt, and penetrated with pity, engaged himself to keep quiet. But he was too

late ; one knew what he thought ; he was the negation, the living remorse. . . . And he was hated. Clerambault no longer bore them a grudge on this account. He could almost have helped them to plaster up their illusions.

What passion of faith in the interior of those souls which felt it to be menaced ! It had a character of tragic and pitiable grandeur. With the politicians, it was complicated with a ridiculous parade of charlatan declamations ; with the intellectuals, with burlesque stubbornness of mad brains. But, in spite of all, one saw the desperate wound ; one heard the cry of anguish which wished to believe, the appeal to the heroic illusion. Among the more simple young hearts, this faith took a touching character. No declamations, no pretensions of knowing ; but an affirmation of dismayed love, which has given all, and which, in return, awaits a single word, the reply : “ It is true ! . . . Thou dost exist, well-beloved, Country, divine power, thou who hast taken my life from me and all that I loved ! ” . . . One longs to kneel before these poor little black dresses—mothers, wives, and sisters—to kiss those thin hands, which tremble with the hope and the fear of the future, and to say to them : “ Do not weep ! You will be consoled.”

Yes, but how can one console them when one does not believe in the ideal which maintains them and

which kills them?—The long-sought-for reply had come to him now without his seeing it enter. “One must love men more than the illusion and more than the truth.”

THE love of Clerambault was not at once requited. Although he had not published anything for several months, he had never been attacked so much. In the autumn of 1917 the attacks against him had risen to an unheard of diapason. A laughable disproportion between those transports of fury and the feeble speech of this man ! It was the same in every country in the world. A dozen poor pacifists, isolated, encircled, without the means of making themselves heard in any great newspaper, scarcely able to speak up, honest, but without brilliancy, unloosed a frenzy of insults and menaces. At the least contradiction the monster Opinion fell down in an epileptic fit. The wise Perrotin, who, although astonished at nothing, remaining prudently quiet and allowing Clerambault to lose himself (as his heart bade him), was secretly frightened at this irruption of tyrannical stupidity. In history, at a distance, one laughs at it. But near at hand, one sees human reason as it is. Why have men more universally lost their calm in this war than in any other of the past ? Has it really been more atrocious ? Childishness ! Prejudiced forgetfulness of all that is done, in our time, under our eyes :

Armenia, the Balkan States, repression of the Commune, colonial wars, new conquests in China or in the Congo. . . . Of all animals we know that the most ferocious has always been the human. Have men then put more faith in war to-day ! . . . On the contrary ! The peoples of the West had arrived at a point in evolution, when war had become so absurd that to make war it is no longer possible to preserve the reason. It has to be fuddled. Be delirious, under pain of death, of death hopeless in blank pessimism. And that is the reason why the voice of a single person who retained his reason threw into fury the others who wished to forget it. They were in terror lest that voice might awaken them, and lest they might find themselves sobered, naked, and dishonoured.

Also, at that moment, things were turning out badly for the war. The great hopes of victory and of glory, so often revived, began to totter. It appeared probable that, from whatever side one looked at it, the war would be for everyone a very bad business. Neither the interests, nor the ambitions, nor the idealisms, would be satisfied. And the bitter deception, for a useless end, caused the men who knew themselves to be morally responsible to fly into a passion. They were bound to accuse themselves or take vengeance on others. The choice was soon made. They attributed their failure to all those who had foreseen and solemnly declared that it would



take place, and who tried to prevent it. Each retreat of the army, each blunder of the diplomats, found an excuse in the machinations of the pacifists. Those men, unpopular, and whom nobody listened to, found themselves invested by their adversaries with the formidable power of organising defeat. So that nobody might be deceived, they were labelled "Defeatists." As with the heretics of the good old times, it only remained to burn them. While awaiting the hangman, his valets missed nothing.

They began to train their hand, by taking in-offensive people—women, teachers, obscure or little-known, knowing ill how to defend themselves. And then they attacked larger morsels. The occasion was good for politicians to rid themselves of dangerous rivals, possessors of dreadful secrets and masters of to-morrow. Above all, they applied themselves, according to an old receipt, to mixing the accusations knowingly, putting in the same sack vulgar sharpers and those whose character or mind troubled them—so that in this mischmash the public might not even attempt to distinguish a good man from a scoundrel. Also, those who were not sufficiently compromised by their acts, were so by their relations. If they did not possess these, they could be lent to them ; they even undertook, if required, to supply them with some of all makes, according to the charge.

Could one be sure that Xavier Thouron was,

when he came to see Clerambault, acting on orders? He was very capable of coming on his own account. And who then could say exactly what his intention was? Did he know himself? There are always in the marshes of great cities unscrupulous adventurers, feverishly out-of-work, who go about everywhere, seeking, like the wolves, "*quem devorant.*" They have enormous appetites and a like curiosity. To fill this bottomless cask, everything is good for them. They can go from one extreme to another, without any trouble. They are just as ready to throw you into the water as to throw themselves in to save you; they are not afraid of losing their skin; but they must nourish the animal which is within—and also amuse it. If it ceased for a moment to grin and to gourmandise, it would die of ennui and with disgust at its nothingness. But there are no risks; it is too intelligent. It will not stop to think, so that, like the Roman emperor, it may not break away from its noble and upright death.

No one could have said exactly what Thouron wanted, when he came for the first time to see Clerambault. He was, as always, full of business, hungry without an object, smelling a bone. He was one of those very uncommon professional people (they are the great journalists) who, without taking the trouble to read what they speak of, can quickly make an idea alive and brilliant, and which often, quite wonderfully, is even quite correct. He re-

cited to Clerambault without too many errors, his "Evangile," and he seemed to believe it. He believed it, perhaps, when he said it. Why not? He was also a pacifist at certain times: that depended on the wind and on the attitude of certain confrères, whose lead he followed or the reverse. Clerambault was touched. He had never been cured of a childish confidence in the first comer who appealed to him. And then, he was not spoiled by the press of his country. He therefore, out of his bigness of heart, allowed his most intimate thoughts to be drawn from him. The other devoured them piously.

An acquaintanceship as closely entered upon could not remain there. There was an exchange of letters, in which the one made the other speak, and the other spoke. Thouron urged Clerambault to put his thought in little popular tracts; and he undertook to distribute them in the working-class quarters. Clerambault hesitated, refused. Not that he condemned, in principle, as do hypocritically the partisans of the established order of things, and of the reigning injustice, the secret propaganda of a new truth, when no other propaganda is possible (all oppressed faith hatches in the catacombs). But, for himself, he did not feel himself suited for this action; to speak out what he thought, and then accept the consequences of what he had said, that was his rôle; what he had said would be diffused of

itself ; there was no need to be a colporteur of it. Besides, a secret instinct, which would have caused him to blush if he had allowed himself to express it, made him mistrust the offers of service of his commercial traveller. He could not, however, put a curb on his zeal. Thouron published in his newspaper a vindication of Clerambault ; he narrated visits and his conversations ; he made known the thoughts of the master, and he amplified them. Clerambault was amazed when he read them ; he did not recognise himself. However, he could not repudiate the paternity of them, for he found, infixed in the commentaries of Thouron, citations from his letters, of which the terms were exact. In these he recognised himself still less. The same words, the same phrases, assumed in the context into which they were grafted, an accent, a colour, which he had never given to them. Add that the censorship, charged with the safety of the State, had, in the quotations, cut out from here and there, half lines, lines and ends of paragraphs, which were perfectly innocent, but the suppression of which would suggest to the overheated mind of the reader the worst iniquities. The effect of such a campaign was immediate ; it was the oil on the fire. Clerambault did not know which way to turn to make his defender hold his peace. He could not have a grudge against him, for Thouron reaped abundantly his share of menaces and insults, and without win-

cing ; his skin had experienced the same thing before !

When they had both been copiously watered, Thouron claimed rights on Clerambault, and after having attempted to get him to take shares in his newspaper, he registered him, without letting him know, in the honorary committee. He took it amiss, because Clerambault, who learned of it several weeks after, was not pleased. Their relations became cool, although he did not cease to use, now and again, in his articles, the name of " his illustrious friend." . . . The latter let him do it, too happy to be quit of him at this price. He had lost sight of him, when he learned, one day, that Thouron had been arrested. He was incriminated in a money affair, squalid enough, in which the talk of the time saw the hand of the enemy. The judges, obedient to the watchword from above, could not fail to find a connection between this mess and the soi-disant pacifist activity which Thouron practised, in an irregular incoherent fashion in his newspaper. He was associated, as was suitable, with the " great Defeatist plot " ; and the despoilment of his correspondence allowed them to compromise whoever they wished. As he had taken care to preserve all his letters, and as he had had letters from all parties, they had a wide enough choice. They chose.

Clerambault learned, through the newspapers, that he was one of the chosen. They exulted !—At

last ! They had got him ! Everything was explained now. For is it not so, that if a man thinks otherwise than the rest of the world, he must have underneath some wicked reason for it ; seek it, and you will find it. . . . They had found it. Without waiting longer, a Parisian newspaper announced the “ treachery ” of Clerambault. There was no trace of it in the dossiers of the law ; but the law permits it to be said, it does not rectify it ; it is not its business. Clerambault, convoked before the judge of instruction, asked in vain that he might be told what his crime was. The judge was polite, showed the respect which was due to a man of his notoriety ; but he seemed in no way urgent to finish the matter ; he had the appearance of one who was waiting for. . . . What then ?—The crime.

MADAME CLERAMBAULT had not the spirit of a Roman matron—or of that proud Israelite, in the celebrated affair which divided France twenty years ago—whom public injustice, leagued against her husband, bound more closely to him. She had the instinctive and fearful respect of the French bourgeoisie for official justice. Although she had every reason to know that the crimination of Clerambault was without foundation, to be criminated appeared to her to be a dishonour, with which she felt herself bespattered. She did not bear it in silence. In reply to her reproaches, Clerambault adopted, though not on purpose, the attitude most likely to exasperate her. Instead of replying, or at least, of defending himself, he said :

“My poor wife ! . . . Why, yes, I understand you.”

“It is unfortunate for you. . . . Why, yes, you are right.” . . .

And he waited until the shower-bath was finished. This acceptance nonplussed Madame Clerambault, who was exasperated at not having an influence ; she knew perfectly well that, while siding with her, he would not alter his way of acting.

As a last shift, she gave her place to him, and went away to pour out her rancour, in the bosom of her brother. Leo Camus did not trouble himself with discretion. He urged her to dissolve marriage. He made it out to her to be a duty. That, however, was too much to ask. The traditional repugnance to divorce, awakening in this honest bourgeoisie her profound fidelity, caused her to find the remedy worse than the disease. The two married people remained together : but their intimacy was lost.

Rosine was almost always absent ; to forget her trouble, she was preparing for a nurse's examination, and a portion of her days was spent outside the house. Even when she was at home, her thoughts were not there. Clerambault had never taken again his former place in the heart of his daughter ; someone else occupied it : Daniel. She replied coldly to the affectionate advances of her father ; that was a way of punishing him for having caused, without wishing it, the estrangement of her friend. She found an explanation for it, and she was too just not to reproach herself for it ; but she did not change any ; injustice relieves.

Daniel did not forget any more than he was not forgotten. He was not proud of his conduct ; and to extenuate his remorse at it, he assigned the responsibility to his environment, the tyrannical opinion of which exercised pressure on him. But in his heart he was discontented with himself.



Chance came to the assistance of the two sullen lovers. Wounded somewhat seriously though not dangerously, Daniel was brought back to Paris. During his convalescence he encountered Rosine. It was near the square of the Bon Marché. He hesitated a moment. But she did not hesitate ; she came to him, they entered the Square and began a long conversation, which embarrassed at first, interspersed with reproaches and confessions, ended in a perfect agreement. They were so absorbed in their tender explanations that they did not see Madame Clerambault pass. The good woman, choked by this meeting which she was far from expecting, hastened to re-enter the house to impart the news to Clerambault : for she could not keep from speaking to him, despite their disagreement. To her angry recital (she could not allow the intimacy of her daughter with a man whose family had insulted them) Clerambault did not reply, according to his new custom. He smiled, nodded his head, and finally he said :

“ Quite so.”

Madame Clerambault stopped, shrugged her shoulders, and looked as if she were going out ; near the door of the room she returned and said with anger :

“ These people have insulted you ; your daughter and yourself were agreed that we would stop seeing them. Now your daughter who was rebuffed by

them makes advances to them ; and you find that quite all right ; there is no way of understanding that. You are mad."

Clerambault tried to prove to her that the happiness of his daughter was not that she might think like him, and that Rosine was quite right to repair the damage done by the foolishness of her father.

"Your foolishness. . . . Oh ! as to that," said Madame Clerambault, "that is the only sensible word that you have spoken in all your life."

"You understand well !" said Clerambault. And he made her promise not to say anything to Rosine ; so that she might be able to arrange her little romance in her own way.

When Rosine returned she was radiant, but said nothing. Madame Clerambault had great difficulty in holding her tongue. Clerambault observed with an affectionate amusement the returned happiness on the face of his daughter. He did not know exactly what had passed ; but he had a good idea—Rosine had gracefully thrown him overboard. The two lovers had concluded their agreement, at the expense of the parents. Both had blamed, with an admirable impartiality, the opposed exaggerations of those old people. The years of suffering in the trenches had, without weakening his patriotism, disabused Daniel of the narrow fanaticism of his family. And Rosine—giving and taking—had admitted quietly that her father was mistaken. She

had not required to make a great effort to reconcile her devout and somewhat fatalistic heart with the stoical acquiescence of Daniel in the established order. They had decided to go on in their own way together without worrying about the disagreements of those who, as one would say, came before them—whom, to be more exact, they had left behind them. They did not wish to be preoccupied any more about the future. Like millions of human beings they only asked of the world their share of actual happiness, and closed their eyes to the rest.

Madame Clerambault had gone out, vexed that her daughter had said nothing of her meeting. Clerambault and Rosine dreamed, each in their own corner : Clerambault, seated at the window smoking ; Rosine holding a newspaper which she did not read. Her happy eyes, which wandered, seeking the details of the scene of a short time ago, encountered the fatigued face of her father. He had an expression of melancholy which struck her. She rose, and standing behind him, placed her hand on his shoulder and said, with a little sigh of compassion, which ill concealed the interior joy :

“ Poor papa ! ”

Clerambault, lifting his eyes, looked at Rosine, whose face shone, in spite of herself.

“ And the little girl is no longer poor ? ”

Rosine blushed.

“ Why do you say that ? ” said she.

Clerambault shook his finger at her. Rosine, leaning over him, from behind, rested her cheek against the cheek of her father.

"She is no longer poor?" repeated he.

"No," said she, "on the contrary, she is very rich."

"Tell a little about what she has." . . .

"She has . . . first of all, her dear papa." . . .

"Oh! the little story-teller!" said Clerambault, trying to disengage himself and look her in the face.

Rosine covered his eyes and his mouth with her hands.

"No, I do not want you to look, I do not want you to speak." . . .

She kissed him, and said again, while fondling him :

"Poor papa!"

SHE had thus escaped from the cares of the house ; and she did not delay to fly away from the nest. She had finished her nurse's examination, and was sent to a provincial hospital. The Clerambaults felt more painfully the blank at their fireside.

The most solitary of the two was not Clerambault. He knew it, and pitied sincerely his wife, who was not strong enough to follow him, nor to detach herself from him. As far as he was concerned, whatever might happen to him now, he would at no time be deprived of sympathies. Persecution itself would cause them to be born, or would urge the most reserved people to express themselves.—And just at that time there came to him precious evidence of this.

One day when he was alone in the room, the bell rang ; he opened the door. A lady whom he did not know handed him a letter, mentioning his name. In the darkness of the hall, she thought she was addressing a servant, and then noticed her mistake. He asked her to come in.

“ No,” said she, “ I am only a messenger.”

She went away. But after she had gone, he found

a little bouquet of violets, which she had placed on the chest, near the door.

The letter said :

*Tu ne cede malis,  
sed contra audentior ito. . . .*

“ You fight for us. Our heart is with you. Pour out to us your suffering. I pour out to you my hope, my strength and my love—I who am not able to act—who cannot act except through you.”

This juvenile zeal, and the last somewhat mysterious words, touched and intrigued Clerambault. He called up the image of his visitor, as she stood on his threshold. She was no longer very young ; well-shaped features, brown and serious eyes, which smiled in a tired face. Where had he seen her before ? While he was setting it down, the image vanished.

He found it again, two or three days after, a few paces from him, in a passage of the Luxembourg. She passed by. He crossed the passage, to join her. She stopped when she saw him coming. He asked her, while thanking her, why she went away so quickly, without telling him who she was. And he noticed at that moment that he had known her for a long time. He had met her not long since at the Luxembourg, or in the streets around, with a big young man who must have been her son. Each time that they passed one another their looks saluted him with a smile of unconstrained respect.

And without knowing their name, without having exchanged a single word, they formed for him a part of those friendly spirits who attend our daily life, whom we do not always notice when they are there, but which leave a blank when they have disappeared. That is why his thought soon went back from the woman who was before him to the young companion who was absent from her side. And he said in a burst of imprudent intuition (for, in these times of grief, who knew those who were still to be numbered among the living ? ) :

“ It is your son who has written me ? ”

“ Yes,” said she. “ He loves you well. We have loved you for a long time.”

“ I hope he may come also ! ”

A shadow of sadness darkened the face of the mother.

“ He cannot come.”

“ Where then is he ? At the front ? ”

“ Here.”

After a moment of silence Clerambault asked :

“ He is wounded ? ”

“ Do you wish to see him ? ” said the mother. Clerambault accompanied her. She remained silent. He did not dare to question her. He said :

“ In any case, you have him still.” . . .

She understood and offered her hand to him :

“ We are very close to one another.”

He insisted :

“ But anyhow you have him.”

“ I have his soul,” said she.

They had reached the house—an old domicile of the seventeenth century, in one of the old and narrow streets, between the Luxembourg and Saint-Sulpice, where still live the collected pride of old Paris. The large door, even in daytime, was closed. Madame Froment, going before Clerambault, ascended the few steps at the bottom of the court-yard which was paved with flags, and entered the room on the ground floor.

“ My dear Edmé,” said she, opening the door of the room, “ here is a surprise for you ! . . . Guess who this is ! ” . . .



CLERAMBAULT saw a young man who was looking at him as he lay stretched out on a bed. The blond face of twenty-five years, which was rosy with the evening sun, was illuminated by intelligent eyes, and appeared so healthy and so fresh, that one did not think of illness, at first, on seeing him.

"You!" . . . he exclaimed, "you here." . . .

A joyous surprise made his features still younger looking. But neither the body, nor the arms which the clothes covered, made a movement; and Clerambault, approaching him, observed that the head alone was living.

"Mama, you have betrayed me," . . . said Edmé Froment.

"You would rather not see me then?" asked Clerambault, leaning on the pillow.

"Not quite that," said Edmé; "I was not very anxious to be seen."

"And why?" said Clerambault, in a kind voice, which he tried to make laughing.

"Because one does not invite people to come, when one is not at home."

"And where then are you?"

"My faith, I could swear . . . in an Egyptian mummy."

He indicated with a look the bed and his motionless body.

"Life is no longer there," said he.

"You are the most alive of us all," protested a voice near him. Clerambault noticed, on the other side of the bed, a big young man, of the age of Edmé Froment, and who seemed to be full of health and strength. Edmé Froment smiled and said to Clerambault :

"My friend Chastenay has so much life that he lends me some."

"Ah ! if I were only able to give it to you !" said the other.

The two friends exchanged an affectionate look. Chastenay continued :

"I would only give back to you a part of what I have received from you."

And, addressing himself to Clerambault :

"It is he who strengthens us. Is it not so, Madame Fanny ?"

The mother said tenderly :

"My generous son ! . . . It is indeed so."

"You take an unfair advantage when I am no longer able to defend myself . . ." (speaking to Clerambault) "you can see I am a prisoner, I cannot move."

"Wounded ?"

"Paralysed."

Clerambault did not dare to ask the details.

"You are not suffering?" said he.

"I ought perhaps to wish I were; pain is still a tie which binds us to the shore. But I confess that I put up with the heavy silence of this body in which I am enclosed. Let us not speak of it any more. After all, the spirit is free. If it is not true that it '*agitat molem*,' it often escapes."

"The other day," said Clerambault, "it came to visit me."

"It is not the first time. It has gone often to you."

"I thought myself quite alone." . . .

"You remember," said Edmé, "the words of Randolph to Cecil: *The voice of a solitary man is capable, in an hour, of bestowing on us more life than the uproar of five hundred bugles continuously sounding.*"

"That is as true of you," said Chastenay.

Froment seemed not to hear him and resumed:

"You have wakened us up."

Clerambault looked at the beautiful, courageous, and calm eyes of the prostrate man, and said:

"Those eyes had no need of it."

"They have no need of it now," said Edmé.

"One can see better at a distance, when one is a good bit away. But when I was near at hand, I perceived nothing."

"Tell me what you see." . . .

"It is late," said Edmé, "I am a little tired. Will you come again?"

"I will come back to-morrow."

Clerambault went out, and Chastenay rejoined him. He felt the need of confiding in a heart which could feel the pain and the grandeur of the tragedy of which his friend was the hero and the victim. Edmé Froment, struck by the splinter of a shell on the spine, was one of the intellectual leaders of his generation, accomplished, ardent, eloquent, overflowing with life and with visions, loving and loved, nobly ambitious. Now, a living corpse. His mother, who had bestowed on him all her pride and her love, saw him doomed. Their anguish must have been very great ; but each one hid it from the other ; and this restraint supported them. They were proud of one another. She tended him ; washed him, and fed him as if he were a little child. And he, making himself calm to make her calm, carried her in his turn on the wings of his spirit.

"Ah !" said Chastenay, "one should feel remorse at being alive and well, at possessing arms to embrace life, to have supple legs to walk and leap, to drink with a full chest this freshness of the blessed air. . . ."

He opened his arms while speaking, raised his head, and breathed deeply.

"And the worst of it," said he, lowering his head and his voice, as if he were ashamed, "the worst of it is that I do not."

Clerambault could not help smiling.

"Yes, it is not heroic," continued Chastenay. "Still, however, I love Froment, like no one else in the world. I am grieved at his lot. . . . But he is stronger than I. When I think of my luck, when so many were killed, to be here at this moment, here with all my senses, I find it very difficult not to shew my joy. . . . Ah! it is too good to live and be whole and sound! . . . Poor Froment! . . . You find me terribly egotistical?"

"Why, no," said Clerambault. "You speak according to a healthy nature. If all were as sincere as you, humanity would not be the prey of the vicious pleasure of glorying in suffering. You have, besides, every right to enjoy life, after having gone through the ordeal."

(He pointed to the "croix de guerre" on the chest of the young man.)

"I have gone through it, and I am going back," said Chastenay. "But, believe me, I have no credit by it! For I would not do it, if I could avoid it. It is useless to throw powder in our eyes. Powder to-day serves other purposes. One does not reach the third year of the war, and still have conserved as much of the love of risk or of the indifference to danger as one had at the beginning. And I possessed it. I am bound to say, I was a fine softy of heroism. But there were glorious times when I lost my virginity! My virginity was composed as much of

ignorance as of rhetoric. After those are overcome, the nonsense of the war, the lunacy of the massacres, the ugliness, the dupery of those frightful sacrifices, open the eyes of the most simple. And if it would not be manly to fly from the inevitable, it is not necessary either to go in search of what can be avoided. The great Corneille was a hero of the rear. Those of the front whom I have known, were almost always heroes in spite of themselves."

"That is true heroism," said Clerambault.

"It is that of Froment," replied Chastenay. "The hero for want of something better, for want of being able to be a man. . . . But what makes him so dear, is that, in spite of all, he is still a man."

CLERAMBAULT verified the justness of those words, in the long conversation which he had, the following day, with Froment. If the courage of Froment did not desert him in the ruin of his life, it was all the more credit to him, because he had never professed to venerate self-denial. He had had great expectations, robust ambitions, which his gifts and his happy youth justified. Unlike Chastenay, he had not had one day's illusion about the war. He had quickly bored through the disastrous folly of it. He did not owe this solely to his firm mind, but to the inspirer, who since childhood had woven the soul of her son from the purest portion of her own.

Madame Froment, whom Clerambault found always at home when he went to see Edmé, remained apart, seated near the window, working, and from time to time throwing a tender look towards her son. She was one of those women who, without possessing an exceptional intelligence, have genius in the heart. The widow of a doctor, who was much older than she, and whose ample intelligence had fertilised hers, she had had in her life only those two profound and widely different affections ; an almost filial affection for her

husband, and an almost amorous affection for her son.

Doctor Froment, a well-educated man, of original mind, which he concealed under the forms of a gentle politeness, careful not to hurt others while differing from them, had been a great traveller during a portion of his life ; he had visited nearly all Europe, Egypt, Persia and India ; eager to learn not only about science, but about religion, he interested himself particularly in new expressions of faith in the world : Babism, Christian Science, and Theosophical doctrines. Having relations with the pacifist movement, a friend of Baroness Suttner, whom he had become acquainted with at Vienna, he foresaw a long time beforehand, the great catastrophe, to which Europe and those whom he loved were promised. But, a man of courage, accustomed to seeing the injustices of nature, he had sought less to deceive himself or to delude his own people about the future than to strengthen their soul to sustain the shock of the billow which was rushing up. Much more than his words, his example had had on his wife—if not on his son who was still a child at the time of his death—a sacred power. Stricken by a slow and cruel illness which was bound to carry him off—a cancer of the intestines—he had, up to the last day, tranquilly pursued his accustomed task, encircling his loved ones with his serenity.

Madame Froment had retained in her heart this



noble picture, like an interior god. Her devotion for her dead companion took in her the place of religion in others. Without a fixed faith in the other world, she prayed to him, every day, above all at intense moments, as if to a friend always present, who watches and advises. Through this singular phenomenon of renewal of life that one often notices after the death of a dear one, the essence of the soul of the husband seemed to have passed into her. That is the reason why her son had grown up in an atmosphere of thought with calm horizons, very different to the feverish landscapes in which the young generation was growing just before 1914—restless, ardent, aggressive, irritated by waiting. . . . When the war broke out, Madame Froment had no need to defend herself or to defend her son against the seductions of national passion. It was a stranger to both of them. They did not attempt either to resist the inevitable. It was such a long time since disaster was on the march! It was a question of withstanding it without yielding, by preserving that which should be preserved: the fidelity of the soul to its faith. Madame Froment did not deem that it was necessary to be *Au-dessus de la mêlée* to govern it; and what two or three writers, in France, England, and Germany, accomplished by their articles for international reconciliation, she accomplished in her limited sphere, more simply, but more efficaciously. She had retained her old

friends ; and without appearing constrained in her environment infected by the spirit of war, without ever engaging in vain demonstrations against the war, she was, by her presence alone, by her calm speech, her sane look, her measured judgment, and by the respect which her goodness inspired, the best check to the insane exaggerations of hate. She distributed also in homes susceptible of being touched by them, the messages of free Europeans, among others, the articles of Clerambault, who never knew anything about it ; and she had the satisfaction of seeing that they reached their hearts. Her greatest joy was that her son himself was transformed by them.

Edmé Froment was not a Tolstoyan pacifist. At the beginning of the war, he thought it was a piece of nonsense, much more than a crime. If he had been free, he would have withdrawn from the battle like Perrotin, into the high dilettantism of art and of thought. He had not tried to combat public opinion, because he deemed it vain to do so ; he felt at that time more of contempt than of pity for the folly of the world. His forced participation in the war had constrained him to recognise that that folly was to such a large extent paid for by suffering that it was superfluous to add contempt to condemnation. Man created for himself his hell upon earth ; he had no need of another judgment. And, at the same time, the words of Clerambault, which reached him during a period of leave in Paris,

revealed to him that he had something better to do than to constitute himself a judge of his companions in chains ; in sharing their burden, to try to deliver them from it.

Only, the young disciple went further than the master. Clerambault, whose affectionate and somewhat feeble nature found his happiness in his communion with other men, suffered if separated from them, even in their errors, perpetually had doubts about himself, looked to the right and to the left, sought in the eyes of the human throng an assent to his own thought, and exhausted himself in fruitless efforts to reconcile his interior law with the aspirations and the social struggles of his time. Froment, the prostrate, endowed with the soul of a leader in an enslaved body, affirmed emphatically, the absolute duty, for him who is possessed by the passion of a mighty ideal, of standing above the heads of his companions. Why should he seek to efface it timidly, and dissolve it amid the mass of other weak lights ? The common-place of democracies, that " Voltaire has less wit than anyone else," is false. . . . "*Democritus ait : Unus mihi pro populo est.*" . . . "One is as much to me as thousands." . . .

The faith of our time sees in the social group the fact of human evolution. Who can prove it ? " I myself, I see," said Froment, " this fact in the superior individual. Millions of men have lived and died in order that a supreme flower of thought might

reach a haven. For such are the magnificent and prodigal ways of nature. It expends multitudes, to create a Jesus, a Buddha, an Aeschylus, a Vinci, a Newton, a Beethoven. But, without those men, what would those multitudes be? . . . What would humanity be? . . . We do not set up the egotistical idea of the Superman. A man who is great is great *for* all men. His individuality gives expression to millions of men, and often it guides them. It is the incarnation of their secret powers, of their highest desires. It concentrates them, and even now it realises them. The sole fact that a man has been Christ, has exalted, raised above the earth, centuries of humanity, and has bestowed on them divine energies. And although nineteen centuries have since gone by, the millions of men have never reached the height of the model, but do not get weary of aspiring to it. The individualistic ideal thus understood is more fruitful for human society than the communist, which leads to the mechanical perfection of the ant-hill. At least, it is indispensable to the other, as a corrective and as a complementary."

This proud individualism, which Froment expressed in burning words, strengthened the mind of Clerambault, which was always somewhat wavering, hesitating through kindness of heart, doubt of himself and the effort to understand others.

Froment rendered him another service. Better

informed than he regarding world thought, having, through his family, friendships among the intellectuals of all countries, and reading four or five foreign languages, Froment informed Clerambault about the other great isolated men, who, in each nation, fought for the rights of free conscience—all that subterranean work of compressed thought, which zealously sought to find the truth. A very consoling spectacle : that the epoch of the most frightful moral tyranny, which ever weighed, since the Inquisition, on the soul of humanity, failed to stifle in an élite of each people the indomitable will to remain free and true !

Unquestionably, those independent individualities were rare, but their power was, on this account, all the greater. Their silhouette was outlined, sharply, on the empty horizon. In the tumble-down of the peoples to the bottom of the precipice where millions of souls crush themselves in a shapeless heap, their voice resounded like the only human voice. And their action declared itself by the rage of those who disowned it. A century ago Chateaubriand wrote :

*“ To struggle henceforth is useless. To be is the only thing which matters.”*

But he did not see that “ to be ” in our time, to be oneself, to be free, is the greatest of all battles. The ones who are themselves prevail by the simple fact of the levelling of the others.

CLERAMBAULT was not the only one to experience the benefit of Froment's energy. At almost every visit, he met at the bedside of the young man some friend who came, without admitting it perhaps, as much to find comfort as to bring it. Two or three young men, of the age of Froment ; the others somewhat elderly, over fifty years of age, old friends of the family or who knew Froment before the war. One of them, an old Greek scholar, with a refined and absent smile, had been his teacher. There was also there a sculptor with grey hair, his face marked with tragic furrows ; a gentleman from the country, with his beard shaved close, a ruddy complexion, and the square head of a rough peasant ; and a doctor with a white beard, and a tired face, which bore the imprint of gentleness, whose look arrested one by the complex expression of the two eyes ; the one, which observed well, had a glimmer of scepticism, and the other, melancholy, seemed to dream.

Those men, who sometimes found themselves together at the home of the sick man, hardly resembled one another. One might have observed in the group all the different shades of thought—from Catholic to free-thinker, and even to bolshevist (as

one of the young comrades of Froment pretended to be). One might have found again in them the impressions of the most varied of intellectual ancestors ; of Lucian the ironical, in the old hellenist ; of the old French chronicler of the Michaud collection in the Comte de Coulanges, who, at night, in his estate, rested from cattle-breeding pursuits, and from chemical manures, in enjoying the rich tongue of Froissart, and that bushy and juicy language of that rascal of a Gondi.

The sculptor furrowed his brow to discover a system of metaphysics in Beethoven and Rodin. And Doctor Verrier, who had for the paradise of religions the disillusioned smile of the man of science, transposed into the kingdom of hypothesis of biology, or into the shattering equation of physics and of modern chemistry, the little kingdom of wonders of which he had need.

Although he might participate sadly in the trials of the day, the era of war, with its clammy glory, was effaced in his eyes, and even now left behind, before the heroic discoveries of thought, which a new Newton, the free German Einstein, accomplished amid the human aberration of mind.

Thus among those men, each one seemed to be different to the others ; both as regards the manner of his mind and as regards his temperament. But all were agreed in this, that they did not depend on any party, that each one thought for himself, and all had

the respect and the love of liberty, of their own liberty and of that of others. What else counts ?

In the times in which we live, all the old outlines, the political, religious and social parties give way ; and it is not saying much to call oneself socialist or even republican, rather than monarchist, if those castes fit in with the nationalism of the State, or of faith, or of class. There are to-day only two kinds of minds ; those which enclose themselves within fences ; and those which are open to all that is living, those which carry entire humanity within themselves, even their enemies. Those men, however few in number they may be, form, without knowing it, the true International, that which rests on the worship of truth and of universal life. And though all are too weak (and know it) to embrace their great ideal, their ideal embraces them all. And thus, all being united in it, they set out, each one along a different road, towards the unknown God.

What attracted those diverse free souls round Edmé Froment was that they perceived dimly in him the point where their lines met, the crossroads from which one sees all the ways of the forest. Froment had not been always the one to reunite them. So long as he was master of his body and healthy, he also followed his own way, apart from the others. But, since his journey had been broken, he had settled—after a period of bitter despair, which he hid



from the eyes of those who surrounded him—at the place where the roads crossed. Even the impossibility of doing anything where he was, permitted him to embrace the ensemble of action and to participate in it in spirit. He saw the diverse currents—country, revolution, struggle of States or of classes, science and faith—as the mixed forces of a torrential river, with its rapids, its eddies, and its sandbanks ; it seems to break itself sometimes, or to go back, or to sleep ; but it advances always, irresistibly. And the reaction, even, is pushed forward. And he, the young man crucified at the crossroads, embraced all the currents, the entire river.

Clerambault found again in him some of the features of Perrotin. But worlds separated Froment from Perrotin. For, if like Perrotin, he did not disavow anything which is ; and if he sought to understand all, it was with a soul enflamed. Everything was, in his heart, movement and ordered passion. Everything, life and death, marched forward and ascended. And he himself, immobile.

HOWEVER, the times were dark. The turn of the year 1917-18 had just been passed. The foggy nights of winter were heavy with the waiting for the supreme onslaught of the German armies. For months it had been announced by menacing rumours ; the raids of the Gothas on Paris had already precluded it. The men of the war affected assurance to the end, the newspapers continued to brag, and Clemenceau had never slept better. But the tension of the minds of the people shewed itself in the increasing sharpness of intestine hates. Suspects in the interior—the defeatists, the pacifists—were blamed for the public miseries. Trials for treason renewed and amused the morals of the rear. One saw multiplied Cornelian police spies, patriotic informers, and fanatical witnesses ; and the barking of the public accuser pursued during entire days the unfortunate hunted beasts. Also, when, towards the end of March, the suspended German offensive on Paris began, the sacred hatred among citizens reached its zenith ; and no one doubted that, if the invasion had made a breach, before it had reached the gates of the town, the pillar of Vincennes, this altar of the menaced and revengeful country, would

have received its victims, innocent or guilty, accused or sentenced.

Clerambault was several times addressed in the street. It did not worry him. Perhaps he was not very well aware of the danger.

Moreau found him, one day, arguing, amid a group of passersby, with a young bourgeois with an enraged look, who had questioned him in an insulting fashion. Whilst he was speaking, there was heard an explosion, not far away, of a shell from "Big Bertha." Clerambault did not appear to notice it, and he calmly continued to explain to the angry man his way of thinking. There was something comical in this obstinacy, and the circle of auditors, who, as good Frenchmen, felt it, exchanged jokes, not very polite, but in no way spiteful. Moreau took the arm of Clerambault to lead him away. Clerambault stopped, looked at the people who were laughing, grasped in his turn the comicality of the situation, and laughed with the others.

"What an old madman ! . . . Hey !" said he to Moreau, who was leading him away.

"There are others. Let him take care," said Moreau impertinently enough.

But Clerambault would not understand.

The preparing of things for the hearing of the charge against him had just entered a new phase. Clerambault was charged with breaking the law of 5th August, 1914, "repressing indiscretions in time

of war " ; he was accused of pacifist propaganda in working-class quarters, where Thouron, it was said, distributed the writings of Clerambault by agreement with the author. Nothing was less true. Clerambault had no knowledge of any propaganda of this kind, and he had not authorised it. Thouron could witness to that.

But that is precisely what Thouron did not do. His attitude was strange. Instead of asserting the facts, he shuffled, he had the appearance of one who was hiding something ; and did it with a sort of ostentation ; he might have wished to arouse suspicion.

The unfortunate thing was that these suspicions turned towards Clerambault. Certes, he said nothing against him, against anybody. He refused to say anything. But he allowed it to be understood that if he wished to speak . . . But he did not wish to do so. He was confronted with Clerambault. He was, perfectly, truly chivalrous. He placed his hand on his heart ; he protested his filial admiration for the " Master," for the " Friend." Clerambault, put out of patience, pressed him to tell the exact story of all that which had passed between them ; the other continued to affirm his " indefectable " devotion ; he would say nothing more, he would add nothing to his depositions, he took all on himself.

He came out of the matter a bigger man, and

Clerambault was suspected of allowing himself to be sheltered by the sacrifice of his vassal. The press did not hesitate ; it accused him of cowardice. However, convocations succeeded convocations ; for almost two months. Clerambault yielded to the trifling questions which the judge put to him, without any decision being arrived at. It might have seemed that a man accused without evidence, kept for such a long time under injurious suspicion, might have the right to public sympathy. But on the contrary the public had a bigger grudge against him because he was not yet condemned. Absurd stories circulated in the press. It was asserted that experts had discovered, in the form of certain letters, by misprints found in a small thin book of Clerambault, that it had been printed by the Germans.

These sillinesses found access to the fabulous credulity of men who had been intelligent (we were assured) before the war . . . there were four years of war, but it seemed centuries. . . .

In short, the good people condemned one of their own people, without ample investigation ; it was not the first time, and it will not be the last. Public opinion, well trained, was indignant that Clerambault continued to be at liberty ; and the newspapers of reaction, who were afraid that their prey would escape them, accused the administration of justice, tried to intimidate it, beseeched that the civil bar of the court of justice might be dispossessed

of the affair, and that it might be carried before a military court. Quickly the excitement rose to one of its paroxysms, which are, in Paris, generally brief, but ungovernable. For this intelligent people become delirious periodically. One may ask oneself why men who, for the most part, are not wicked, and would be naturally inclined to mutual tolerance, even to indifference, can give way to these explosions of coleric fanaticism, in which they abdicate, for the time being, their heart and their good sense. Others will say that this people in its virtues as in its vices, is like a woman, that the fineness of its nerves, and its sensitiveness, which have always made its art and its taste prized, deliver it over, in fits, to cries of hysteria. But I think that any people is only like a man through accident, if one means by a man a rational animal—which is very flattering, but which has no foundation. Men only use their reason at far-off times. They are quite foundered by the effort to think. Their burden is lightened by others choosing for them, by choosing that which requires the least effort. It is hardly necessary for them to have a new thought. Let us not condemn them ! The Friend of all the persecuted has said, with His indulgent heroism : “ They know not what they do.”

There existed a nationalist paper which stirred up the malevolent instincts which hatch in those poor men. It lived by the exploitation of suspicion and hate. It called that : working for the regeneration

of France. In its eyes, France consisted of itself and its friends. It published against "Clerambosche" a series of murderous articles, like those which had succeeded so well against Jaurès ; it stirred up public opinion, claiming that occult influences were employed to protect the traitor, and that if they were not watchful, he would be allowed to escape. And it appealed to popular justice.

VICTOR VAUCOUX hated Clerambault.

He did not know him. Hate does not need to know. But if he had known him, he would have hated him still more. Before knowing that Clerambault existed, he was his born enemy. There are in each country races of minds which are mutual enemies, more so than races of different skins, or of different uniforms.

Of a rich bourgeois family of the west of France, he belonged to a family of State officials of the empire and of the moral order who had retired forty years before with the vindictiveness of a barren opposition. He had in Charrente estates where he passed the summer ; the rest of the time he stayed in Paris. A rarefied family—a common phenomenon among his class. He exercised over his family the instincts of government, for which he did not find employment in life. This constriction had given him a tyrannical character. He acted the despot over his relations. Without knowing it. As if it were a right and a duty which were beyond discussion. The word tolerant had no meaning for him. *He could not be wrong.* However, he had intelligence and moral vigour—and even a heart, but all was



bound and squeezed under a thick sapwood, like an old knotty trunk. His powers, prevented from expanding, remained in a heap. He absorbed nothing from the outside. When he read, when he travelled, it was with hostile eyes, and the desire to be home again. Nothing ever made an incision in the bark ; his whole life came to him from the foot of the tree, from the earth—from *the dead*.

He was the type of that fraction of the race which, strong but grown old, has no longer enough life to diffuse itself outside, and knits itself in a feeling of aggressive defence. It observes with distrust, with antipathy, the new young forces which overflow around it, among its own people, and among other peoples, the nations and classes which grow up, all the passionate, maladroit efforts towards social and moral renovation. It requires, like poor Barrès and his stunted hero,<sup>1</sup> walls and fences, frontiers and enemies.

In this state of siege, Vaucoux lived and caused his own people to live. His wife, gentle, morose, effaced, had found the only way of getting out of it ;

<sup>1</sup> "Simon and I then understood our hatred of foreigners, of barbarians, and our egotism in which we *enclose* with ourselves the whole of our small moral family. *The first care of him who wants to live, is to surround himself with lofty walls ; but into his closed garden, he introduces those who direct types of feeling and interests similar to his own.*"—*A Free Man*.

Within three lines three times this "Free Man" expresses the idea of "enclosing," "closing," and "surrounding with walls."

she had died. Left alone with his grief—which he defended jealously, as he defended everything which belonged to him—possessor of an only son thirteen years old, he had mounted guard over his youth and had taught him to mount guard with him. Strange! To create sons, to struggle against the future! . . . Left to himself, the young boy might have, by instinct, found life. But in the jail of his father he was the prey of the father. A closed house. Few friends. Few books. Few newspapers. A sole newspaper, whose petrified principles responded to the need of conservation (in the corpse-like sense) of Vaucoux. His victim—his son—could not escape from him. He inoculated him with his maladies of mind, like those insects which inject their eggs in the living body of another. And when the war broke out, he conducted him to the recruiting office, and caused him to enlist. For a man of his kind, the country was the purest of beings, the holy of holies. He did not require to experience the intoxication of it, to inhale it in the air vibrant with the suggestions of the crowd (he did not mix with the crowd). The Country was in him. The Country, the Past, the eternal Past.

And his son was killed, like the son of Clerambault, like those of millions of fathers, for the faith of those fathers, for the ideal of the past, in which they did not believe.

But Vaucoux knew nothing of the doubts of

Clerambault. Doubt ! he did not know what it was to doubt. Had he been capable of doing so he would have been ashamed of himself. This hard man loved his son passionately although he might never have shown it to him. And he did not conceive any other way of proving it than by a passionate hatred against those who had killed him. He did not count himself among the murderers.

To him the means of vengeance were limited. Affected with rheumatism, with ankylosis in one arm, he tried to enlist, and was not accepted. He was bound, however, to act ; he could only do it by thinking. Alone in his deserted house, with his dead wife and his dead son for company, he was for hours delivered over to his violent meditations. Like a caged beast, which shakes its iron bars, his thoughts turned furiously in the circle of the war, which was fenced around by the trenches—waiting to hurl himself into it, and watching for an opening.

The articles of Clerambault, heralded by the shriekers of the press, exasperated him. What ! talk of drawing from his teeth the bone of hate ! . . . By the little which he knew of Clerambault before the war, he could not suffer him. The writer was antipathetic to him by his new forms of art, and the man by his love of life and men, by his democratic idealism, by his somewhat silly optimism, and his European aspirations. At first sight, with the instinct of the rheumatic (with rheumatism in the

mind as well as in the joints), Vaucoux had classed Clerambault among those who create draughts of air in the house with the doors and windows closed—the Country. The Country, as he understood it : for him there was no other Country. He had no need of the excitations of the newspapers to see in the author of *The Appeal to the Living* and of the *Forgiveness from the Dead*, the agent of the enemy—the enemy.

And his fever of vengeance, which gnawed itself, rushed at this nourishment.

AH ! God ! How easy it is to hate without understanding those who do not think like you.

Clerambault had no longer this resource. He understood those who detested him. He understood them perfectly. Those good people suffered to the point of madness, from the injustice of the enemy. Without doubt, because the injustice hit them. But also loyally, because it was Injustice, Injustice with a capital I ; for as they were short-sighted, it appeared to them enormous and by itself, and obstructed the field of their vision. How limited is the capacity of an ordinary man to feel and to judge ! Submerged in space he grasps at the first floating debris ; in the same way as he reduces to a few colours a flood of light with its infinite shades of colour, the good and the evil which runs in the veins of the universe are only perceptible to him if he bottles a few chosen examples near to him. All the good, all the evil of the world, is contained, from that time, in the bottle. He projects upon that all his power of love and of repulsion. For thousands of excellent people the condemnation of Dreyfus, or the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*, remains the Crime of the century. And the excellent people do not see that

crime paves the pathway of society, and that they march on it, without suspecting it ; because they make a profit from unknown injustices and they do nothing to prevent them. Of all those injustices, which are the most hideous—those which resound in long and profound echoes in the conscience of the world, or those which only the stifled victim knows ? . . . But our excellent people have not large enough arms to embrace all miseries. He who embraces too much binds badly. They embrace only one, but they bind it well. And when they have made a choice of a crime to hate, it absorbs all the power of hatred which is in their viscera ; the dog gnaws its bone ; take care not to touch it !

Clerambault had touched it. If he was bitten he could not complain. He did not complain. Men are right to fight against injustice when they see it. And it is not their fault if they see only its big toe. Gulliver at Brobdignag. Each one does what he can do.

They were biting.

It was Good Friday. The great tide of invasion flowed to the assault of the Ile-de-France. The day of sacred grief had not suspended the massacre. The secular war no longer knows the Truce of God. Christ had just been bombarded in one of his churches. The news of the murderous explosion at nightfall, at Saint Gervais, was spread during the evening in a darkened Paris, which muffled itself up in grief, rage and fear.

The grieved friends had come together at Froment's house. Without word having been sent, each one had come, because he knew he would find the others. They saw, on all sides, violence—in the present, in the future, with the enemy, with their own people, in the camp of reaction as well as in the camp of revolution. They founded their doubts and their anguish in one same thought. And the sculptor said :

“ Our holy convictions, our faith in peace, in human fraternity, rest in vain on reason and in love. Is there then no hope that they may conquer men ? We are too weak ! ” . . .

And Clerambault without thinking of it, repeated the words of Isaiah, which rose to his memory :

*"Darkness covers the earth,  
Gross Darkness the people." . . .*

He had stopped. But from his scarcely lighted bed Froment, invisible, continued :

*"Arise, for on the summit of the mountains Light comes . . ."*

"It comes," repeated the voice of Madame Froment, who was seated at the foot of the bed in the dark at the side of Clerambault. Clerambault grasped her hand. It was as if a trickle of water passed through the room.

"Why do you say that?" asked the Comte de Coulanges.

"Because I see *Him*."

"I see *Him* also," said Clerambault.

Doctor Verrier asked him :

"Who?"

But before the reply could be uttered, all knew already what was going to be said :

"He who brings the Light. . . . The God who will conquer."

"Wait for a God!" said the old Greek scholar.

"You anticipate a miracle?"

"The miracle is ourselves. Is it not a miracle that in this world of perpetual violence, we defend the eternal faith in love and the union of men?"

Coulanges said harshly :

"Christ has been awaited during centuries. When he comes, he is ignored and crucified. Then,



he is forgotten, except by a handful of poor creatures who are good, but few in number. This handful grows bigger. For a lifetime the faith blossoms. Afterwards, its nature is changed, it is betrayed by success, by ambitious disciples, by the Church. And so on for centuries. . . . *Adveniat regnum tuum.* . . . Where is it, the kingdom of God ? ”

“ In us,” said Clerambault. “ The chain of our trials and of our hopes form the Christ eternal. We should be happy, in thinking of the privilege which we have received, of sheltering in our heart, like the child in its cradle, the new God.”

“ And what to us is the token of his arrival ? ” asked the doctor.

“ Our existence,” said Clerambault.

“ Our sufferings,” said Froment.

“ Our disregarded faith,” said the sculptor.

“ The sole fact that we exist,” resumed Clerambault, “ this paradox thrown in the face of Nature, which disowns it. A hundred times the flame is kindled and goes out, before remaining alight. Each Christ, each God tried himself in advance by a series of precursors. They are everywhere, lost, isolated in space, isolated in the centuries. But those solitary ones, who do not know one another, all see in the horizon the same luminous point. The look of the Saviour ; he comes.”

Froment said :

“ He is come.”

When they separated, with an emotion of mutual tenderness, and almost without words, so as not to break the religious charm which remained with them, each one found himself alone, in the darkness of the street, preserving the memory of a charm which he could not understand. The curtain had fallen again ; but they did not forget that they had seen it raised.

SEVERAL days after, Clerambault, who had gone to the convocation of the judge-instructor, returned to his home, all spotted with mud. His hat which he held in his hand, was in tatters ; his hair was soaked by the rain. On seeing him the servant uttered an exclamation. He made a sign to her to keep quiet, and went towards his room. Rosine was absent. And husband and wife, left alone in the vacant flat, never saw one another except at meals, when they spoke to one another as little as possible. But at the cry of the servant, Madame Clerambault foresaw a new misfortune, and the explanations of the servant confirming her fears, she entered the room of Clerambault, and exclaimed, in her turn :

“ Ah, my God ! What have you done now ? ”

Clerambault, ashamed, smiled timidly and excused himself :

“ I slipped.”

He tried to conceal the traces of the accident.

“ You have slipped ? . . . Turn yourself ! . . . What a plight you are in ! . . . My God ! there is not to be another second's peace with you ! . . . Do not look at your feet. . . . You are splashed

with mud up to the eyes. . . . And there, and there, on the cheek." . . .

"Yes, I believe that I knocked against . . ."

"Ah! how unfortunate you are! . . . You 'believe' that you knocked against . . . You have slipped? . . . You have fallen?" . . .

She looked him in the face :

"It is not true !"

"I assure you" . . .

"It is not true. . . . Tell me the truth. . . . You have been struck?"

He did not reply.

"They have struck you ! . . . Ah ! the savages ! . . . My poor man ! They have struck you ! . . . You, so good, you who all your life have never done any harm to anybody. . . . Ah ! it is too wicked !" . . .

She kissed him, sobbing.

"My good wife !" said he, much moved. "It is not worth worrying about. And then, I am soiling you, you must not touch me." . . .

"That is nothing," said she, "I have too much on my heart. Forgive me."

"Forgive you for what ! . . . What did you say there?"

"I also have acted badly towards you, I have not understood you . . . (I will never understand you) . . . but I know well that, whatever you may do, you wish only the good. And I ought to have

defended you, and I have not done it. And I had a grudge against you, because of your foolishness (it is I who am a fool), I had a grudge against you for doing us harm with everybody. . . . But, now, . . . no, it is too unjust ! Men who would not be worthy to unloose the latches of your shoes. . . . They have struck you ! . . . Let me alone, so that I can kiss your poor damaged face.”

It was good for them to find one another again, after having lost one another. When she had wept much on the neck of Clerambault, she helped him to reclothe himself ; she bathed his cheek with arnica ; she took away his clothes to brush them. At the table, she brooded over him with faithful and restless eyes. And he endeavoured to distract her from her fears, by talking of old familiar things. To be both alone, that evening, and without children, took them back to the old years, at the beginning of their marriage. This secret commemoration had a melancholy and pacifying sweetness, just as the *Angelus* of evening diffuses in the approaching darkness a last cooled radiance of the *Angelus* of noon.

Towards ten o'clock the bell rang. It was Julien Moreau, with his comrade Gillot. They had read the evening papers which related the incident, in their own way. Some of them spoke of an exemplary chastisement inflicted by the public, and rendered homage to the “spontaneous” indignation of the crowd. The others, the serious news-

papers, deeply deplored, in principle, popular justice which is exercised in the public street ; but they threw the responsibility for it on the feebleness of the authorities, which hesitated to let everything be known. It was not impossible that their blame of the government was inspired by the government : prudent politicians know, on occasions, how to get their hands forced, in order to accomplish what they want, but of which they are not proud. The arrest of Clerambault seemed imminent. Moreau and his friend showed themselves to be uneasy. Clerambault signed to them, to say nothing in the presence of his wife ; and, after having spoken for some time of the adventure of the day, in a jocular way, he led them into his study. He asked them what was troubling them. They showed him a malicious article in the nationalist newspaper, which for weeks had raged against Clerambault. Its appetite having been whetted by the demonstration of that evening, it convoked its friends to do it again the following day. Moreau and Gillot foresaw scenes of violence, when Clerambault went to the Palais ; and they came to prevail upon him not to leave his house. Knowing his timid character, they thought they would have no need to insist. But Clerambault did not appear to understand, any more than he did when Moreau found him arguing in the middle of a crowd.

“ Not go out ? Why not ? I am not ill.”

"It would be more prudent."

"On the contrary it will do me good."

"One does not know what may happen."

"One never does know. It is time enough when it does happen."

"In a word, to speak frankly, there is danger. For a long time, they have been excited. You are hated. Your name is sufficient to make the eyes start out of the head of some of those imbeciles, who only know you by their newspapers. And those who are leading them are looking for an uproar. By the awkwardness, even, of your enemies, your words have had a greater echo than they think. They are afraid that those ideas may spread, and they wish to make an example, which may frighten those who follow you."

"Well, but," said Clerambault, "if indeed there are some who follow me—(I was not aware of such)—it is not the time for me to conceal myself; and if they wish to make an example of me, I cannot refuse." He seemed to be so easy about the matter, that they asked him if he had understood properly.

"I tell you that you run a great risk," insisted Gillot.

"Ah, my friend," replied Clerambault, "to-day everybody runs a risk."

"It should, at least, have a useful object. Why play their game and throw yourself in the mouth of the wolf?"

"Ah, well," said Clerambault, "I think, on the

contrary, that that may be a very good thing for us, and that, even though it come to pass, it is the wolf which will be the loser. I will explain to you. . . . They spread our ideas. Violence consecrates the cause which it persecutes. They wish to frighten. They will frighten . . . their own people, the wavering people, the timorous people. Let them be unjust. It will be at their expense."

He seemed to forget that it would also be at his own expense.

They saw that he was decided ; and their respect increasing with their anxiety, they declared :

"In that case, we will come with our friends, to accompany you."

"No, no. . . . What an idea ! You want to make me ridiculous. . . . I am sure that nothing at all will take place."

Their insistences were futile.

"You will not prevent me from coming," said Moreau. "I am as stubborn as you. You will not put me off. Sooner than miss you, I will pass the night seated on the bench in front of your door."

"Go and lie down in your bed, my dear friend," said Clerambault, "and sleep peacefully. You may come to-morrow, if you wish. But you will be wasting your time. Nothing will happen. Kiss me, all the same."

They kissed him affectionately.

"So you see," said Gillot, on the threshold of the



door, "we have charge of you. We are, to some extent, your sons."

"That is true," said Clerambault, with a good-natured smile.

He was thinking of his son. And, closing the door, it was several minutes before he perceived that he was standing dreaming, with the lamp in his hand, motionless, in the antechamber from which he had just accompanied his young friends to the door. It was near midnight, and Clerambault was tired. However, instead of going to the connubial chamber, he returned mechanically to his study. The room, the house, the street, were asleep. He seated himself and again became motionless. Without seeing it he was looking vaguely at the reflection of the light on the transparent engraving of Rembrandt, the "Resurrection of Lazarus" which was nailed to one of the uprights of his book-case. . . . He smiled to a dear form. It had just noiselessly entered. It was there.

"This time you are pleased?" thought he. "It is indeed what you wished?"

And Maxime said :

"Yes."

He added with roguishness :

"It has not been without trouble that I have fashioned thee, papa."

"Yes," said Clerambault, "we have many things to learn from our sons."

They looked at one another in silence, and smiled.

CLERAMBAULT retired to rest. His wife was asleep ; no care had caused her to lose the peace of those profound slumbers, in which some souls are swallowed up as in a tomb. That of Clerambault was less urgent to fall into them. Stretched out on his back, he remained with open eyes, motionless, all night.

Pale glimmers of the street, soft half-darknesses. Quiet, luminous bodies played about, in the sombre sky. One of them glided and described a circle : an aeroplane which watched over the sleeping town. The eyes of Clerambault followed it in its flight and planed with it. His attentive ear perceived now the far-off humming of the human planet. A music of the spheres, which the sages of Ionia had never foreseen . . .

He was happy. His body and his mind seemed to him to be lightened ; his limbs, relaxed as well as his thoughts, allowed themselves to be wafted up. . . . The images of the feverish and fatiguing day encountered him on the way, but they did not stop him. . . . An old man jostled by a band of young bourgeois. . . . Too many gestures, too much noise ! But they are already far away. Just like the faces one sees for a moment grinning at the carriage

doors of a moving train. The train has glided away. The vision buries itself in the rumbling tunnel. . . . And on the nocturnal sky, the mysterious luminous body continues to glide. Around, the taciturn spaces, the dull transparence and the chilling freshness of the air on the naked soul. Infinitude of life in a drop of life, in the spark of a heart which has almost gone out, but which is free and knows that soon it will enter the great home.

And like the good steward of a property which has been confided to him, Clerambault drew up the balance sheet of his journey. He saw again his endeavours, his exertions, his enthusiasms, his errors. How little remained of his life ! Almost all that he had constructed he had afterwards destroyed, with his own hands ; he had denied with the same heart that he affirmed ; he had never ceased to wander in the forest of doubts and of contradictions, bruised and bleeding, having nothing to shew him the way but the imperfectly seen stars, which appeared and disappeared between the branches. What meaning had this long tumultuous journey, which was broken in the darkness ? One only. He had been free. . . .

*Free.* . . . What was this Liberty, which overflowed him with its imperious ecstasy ? Liberty, of which he felt himself the master and the prey—*this necessity of being free* ? He was not the dupe of it ; he knew well that he was not free of the eternal enchainment, any more than others ; but the instruc-

tions which he had received were different from those of the others, for all have not the same. The word Liberty only expresses one of the orders—loud and clear—of the invisible Sovereign which rules the worlds—Necessity. It is she who calls into action the Precursors and who makes them struggle with the oppressive past, which the blind multitudes drag along. For it is the field of battle of the eternal Present, in which the Past and the Future eternally struggle. And on this field the ancient laws are unceasingly broken to pieces, in order to give place to the new laws, which will be broken in their turn.

O Liberty, thou carriest always chains, but those are not now those too contracted chains of the past ; each one of thy movements extends thy prison. Who knows ? Who knows ? . . . Later on ! . . . By dint of breaking down the walls of the prison. . . .

Meanwhile, those whom thou wishest to save are determined to ruin thee. Thou art the public enemy. *Thou art One against all.* (Thus they have described the feeble, uncertain, mediocre Clerambault) ; but it is not of him that he dreams at this moment, it is of Him, who has always been, since men have existed, Him who has never ceased to combat their follies in order to deliver them from them.—*The One whom they are all against.* . . . How often, during the centuries, have they rejected and crushed Him ! But in the heart of the anguish, a supernatural joy takes possession of him and fills

him. It is the sacred grain, the grain of gold of Liberty. In the obscure Destiny of the world—(from what ear fallen)—circulates, since chaos, the seed of light. At the bottom of the savage heart of man, frail seed became incrustated. Along the tide of the ages, it underwent the assault of the elementary laws, which bind and pound life. But unwearingly the grain of gold has grown larger. Man, of all the animals, the one least armed, marched against Nature, and gave battle to her. And each one of his steps was paid for with his blood. In this colossal duel, he has been obliged to proceed against Nature, not only outside of him, but inside of him, because he shares in her. That is the hardest battle, that which man, divided, wages against himself. Who will conquer? On one side, Nature, with her chariot of brass, which carries off worlds and peoples into the abyss. On the other, the free Word.

Slaves, laugh at him! . . . "Ridiculous!" say they, those devotees of Force. "A poodle which yelps at the wheels of an express train."—Yes, if man were only a piece of matter, which bleeds and cries in vain under the hammer of Fatality. But the Spirit is in him—the lightning which knows how to hit Achilles right on the heel, and Goliath on the forehead. Let him draw out a screw-nut, and the train comes to ruin, and its journey is ended! . . . Planetary whirlwinds, obscure human masses, move tumultuously through the centuries, while the light-

nings of the liberating Spirit flash through them ;  
 Buddha, Jesus, the Sages, and the Breakers of chains.  
 . . . The lightning comes, I feel it crackling in my  
 bones, as fire crackles in flint under horse-shoes.

The air trembles, the great billows flow. . . .  
 The precursory rumbling. . . . The stifling clouds  
 of hatred come close together, they collide. . . . O  
 fire, thou art about to burst forth ! . . . You who  
 are alone against all, what do you lament about ?  
 You have escaped the yoke which was crushing you.  
 As in a nightmare in which one is engulfed, one  
 struggles, one tears oneself away from the black  
 waters of the dream, one swims, one plunges in  
 again, one is choked. . . . And behold, by a des-  
 pairing jerk, one throws oneself out of the water, and  
 falls back. . . . Saved ! . . . on the pebbles of the  
 bank. . . . The pebbles bruise me. So much the  
 better ! I awake to the free air. . . .

Now, menacing world, I am free from thy  
 shackles. Thou canst not put me into them again.  
 And you who fight against me, against my hated  
 will, my will is in you. You wish, like me, to be  
 free, you suffer from not being so. And it is your  
 suffering which makes you my enemies. But if you  
 killed me, the light which is in me and which you  
 have seen is no longer dependent on you, even if  
 you have seen it, or if, having seen it once, you have  
 thereafter disowned it. Strike then ! In fighting  
 against me, you fight against yourselves ; you are

beaten beforehand. As for myself, in defending myself, I am defending you. *One against all is One for all.* And it will soon be *One with all.* . . .

I will not remain alone. I have never been alone. To you, brothers of the world ! However far off you may be spread over the earth like a shower of grain, you are all here, at my side ! I know it. For the thought of the solitary man is never, like him, isolated. The idea which springs up in one germinates already in others ; and when an unfortunate man, slighted, outraged, feels it rise in his heart, what joy he has ! It is as if the earth was waking up. . . . The first spark which shines in a solitary soul is the point of the beam which will pierce the darkness. Come then, light ! Consume the darkness which surrounds me and that which fills me. . . . " Clerambault " !

THE fresh light of day had returned. Ever young, ever new. The contaminations of men do not touch it. The sun absorbs them, as it does a fog.

Madame Clerambault awoke, and she saw her husband, with his eyes open. She thought he had just wakened also :

“ You have had a good sleep,” she said. “ You have not stirred all night.”

He did not contradict her, but smiled at the long journeys which he had made. The Spirit, the high-spirited bird, which flies through the night. . . . He came to earth again. He rose.

At the same hour, another man rose, a man who had not slept that night any more than he, who had, like him, conjured up his dead son, and who was thinking of him—of him, Clerambault, whom he did not know—with the fixity of hate.

A letter from Rosine arrived, by the first post. She confided to her father the secret which Clerambault had guessed for a long time. Daniel had declared his love. They would be married at his next return from the front. She asked, as a matter of form, the consent of her parents. She knew so



well that her wishes were theirs ! Her letter radiated a happiness of which nothing came to trouble the triumphant certainty. The mournful enigma of the tortured world had now a meaning ! That young absorbing love did not find that the universal suffering was a price too high for the flower that it gathered on that blood-stained rose-bush. She preserved, however, her sympathetic heart. She did not forget others and their suffering, her father and his cares ; but she encircled them with her happy arms ; she appeared to say to them, with an innocent and tender audacity :

“ Dear friends, do not worry yourself any more about your ideas ! You are not reasonable. You should not be sad. You can see well that happiness is coming . . . ”

Clerambault touched, laughed on reading the letter. . . .

Without doubt, happiness comes ! But all the world has not the time to wait on it. . . . Salute it on my behalf, little Rose, and never part from it. . . .

Towards eleven o'clock the Comte de Coulanges looked in to ask about him. He had found Moreau and Gillot, who mounted guard at the door. As they had promised, they came to escort Clerambault ; but, as they had arrived an hour sooner than was necessary, they did not venture to present themselves. Clerambault called them in, and jested with

them on their excess of zeal. They admitted that they mistrusted him ; they feared that he would leave the house without waiting for them. And Clerambault admitted that he had thought of it.

The news from the front was good. Of late, the German offensive appeared to be arrested, and strange symptoms of giving way shewed themselves ; rumours, which seemed to be well founded, caused it to be thought that in this formidable mass there was a secret work of disorganisation. It had, it was said, attained the limit of its powers, and it had gone beyond it. : The athlete was exhausted. There was talk of contagion by the revolutionary spirit, brought from Russia by the German troops from the Eastern front.

With the customary inconstancy of the French mind, the pessimists of yesterday proclaimed the approaching victory. Moreau and Gillot anticipated the appeasement of passions, and with little delay, the return to good sense, the reconciliation of the peoples, and the triumph of the ideas of Clerambault. Clerambault bade them not to entertain too many illusions. And he amused himself by describing to them what would happen when the peace was signed (for it had to be signed some day !).

"It seems to me," said he, "that I see, on looking down on the city, like the Devil on two sticks, the night, the first night which will follow the armistice.

I see, in the houses in which the shutters are closed to the cries of joy in the street, innumerable hearts in mourning ; stretched for four years with the hard thought of a victory which would give to their misery a meaning, a false semblance of meaning, they are now able to relax, or to break their hearts, to sleep, and to die at last ! The politicians will think of the most sharp and lucrative way to exploit the winning party, or to operate a restoration on the trapeze, if they have calculated badly. The professionals of the war will seek to make the pleasure last, or if they are not able to do so, to renew it as soon as possible. The pre-war pacifists will be found again at their post, all having come out of their holes ; they will show themselves off in touching demonstrations. The old masters who have beat the drums in the rear for five years, will reappear, with the olive branch in their hands, smiling, their lips pursed, and speaking of love. The fighting men who swore, in the trenches, never to forget, will be ready to accept all the explanations, the congratulations, and the handshakes, which people care to give them. It is much too painful not to forget ! Five years of crushing fatigues dispose towards complaisances, through lassitude, ennui, and the desire to be finished with them. The flonflons of victory will stifle the cries of grief, of the conquered. The greater number will only think of going back to the old sleepy habits of pre-war days. They will dance on the tombs,

and then they will sleep. The war will only be a fireside boast. And who knows? They will succeed perhaps so well in not remembering, that they will aid the masters of the dance (Death) to renew it. Not at once, but later, when people are well asleep. . . . Thus there will be peace everywhere—until a new war begins. Peace and war, my friends, in the sense that they are understood, are only two labels for the same bottle. As King Bomba said of his valiant soldiers, ‘ clothe them in red, clothe them in green, they will hook it just the same ! ’ You say peace, you say war ; there is neither peace nor war, there is universal servitude, movements of dragged-on multitudes, like an ebb and flow. And it will be thus, as long as strong souls will not raise themselves above the human ocean and will not risk the battle, which appears to them to be foolish, against the fatality which moves those heavy masses.”

“ Battle against Nature ? ” said Coulanges.  
 “ You wish to overpower its laws ? ”

“ There is not,” said Clerambault, “ a sole immutable law. Laws, like beings, live, change and die. And the duty of the mind—so far from accepting them, as the stoics said—is to modify them, and to recut them to its measure. Laws are the shape of the soul. If the soul grows greater, let them grow with it ! The sole just law is that which is appropriate to my stature. . . . Am I wrong in wishing

that the shoe may be made to fit the foot, and not the foot to fit the shoe ? ”

“ I do not say that you are wrong,” replied the count. “ In breeding we change the course of nature. Even the shape and the instinct of the lower animals can be modified. Why not the human animal ? No, I do not blame you. I hold, on the contrary, that the end and the duty of every man worthy of the name is just, as you say, to alter human nature. That is the source of true progress. Even to try the impossible has a concrete value. But that is not to say that what we try we shall succeed in doing.

“ We will not succeed, for ourselves and for our own people. That is possible. That is probable. Our unhappy nation, perhaps our Occident, is on a baleful declivity ; I am afraid that it is starting out very quickly towards its decline, by the fact of its vices and of virtues which are not less deadly, with its pride and its hates, with its jealous village spites, with its endless skein of revenges, with its obstinate blindness, with its crushing fidelity to the past and with its obsolete conception of honour and of duty, which leads to sacrificing the future to the tombs. I am much afraid that the supreme warning of this war may have taught nothing to its tumultuous and lazy heroism. . . . In other times, I would have been oppressed by this thought. Now I feel myself detached, as from my own body, from that which

ought to die ; I have no other connection with it than that of pity. But my spirit is brother to him who, on whatever point of the globe, receives the new fire. Do you know the beautiful words of the Seer, Saint John of Acre? ”

“ *The Sun of Truth is like the sun of the heavens, which has numerous orients. One day, it rises at the sign of Cancer, another at the sign of the Balance. But the sun is one sun. Once the Sun of Truth cast its rays from the zodiac of Abraham, then it set at the sign of Moses and set the horizon on fire ; then it rose at the sign of Christ burning and resplendent. Those who were with Abraham on the day when the light shone on Sinai, became blind. But my eyes will always be fixed on the rising sun, at whatever point it rises. Even if the sun rose in the Occident it would always be the sun.* ”

“ It is from the North to-day that the light comes to us,” said Moreau, laughing.

ALTHOUGH the convocation was not till one o'clock and although twelve o'clock at noon had hardly struck, Clerambault was eager to go out ; he was afraid of being late.

He had not far to go. His friends did not require to defend him against the set which awaited him at the approaches to the Palais, which besides was very thinly scattered ; for the news of the day distracted it from those of the evening. A few cowardly curs, more noisy than alarming, had tried, at the most, to give a dry wipe, prudently, from behind.

They had arrived at the corner of the rue de Vaugirard and of the rue d'Assas. Clerambault, noticing that he had forgotten something, left his friends for a moment, to go back to get some papers in his room. They remained waiting on him. They saw him cross the roadway. On the footpath opposite, near a carriage station, a man of his own age, a bourgeois with grey hair, not very tall, and somewhat heavy, accosted him. It was done so quickly that they had not even time to shout. An exchange of words, an arm which extends, the snap of a shot. They saw him waver and run. Too late.

They stretched him out on a seat. A crowd, more

curious than moved (they had seen so much ! they had read so much !), crowded round to look :

“ Who is he ? ”

“ A defeatist.”

“ That is all right then. These swine have done us enough injury ! ”

“ There is worse than to wish that the war may be finished.”

“ There is only one way of finishing it, and that is to go on to the end. It is the pacifists who prolong the war.”

“ You can say that they have caused it. Without them, it would not have taken place. The Bosche counted on them.” . . .

And Clerambault, half conscious, thought of the old woman, who dragged faggots to the wood-pile of John Huss—“ *Sancta simplicitas* ” !

Vaucoux had not fled. He allowed the revolver to be taken from his hands. He was held by the arms. He remained motionless, and looked at his victim, who looked at him. Both thought of their sons. Moreau threatened Vaucoux. Unmoved, rigid, in his malignant faith, Vaucoux said :

“ I have killed the enemy.”

Gillot, leaning over Clerambault, saw him feebly smile, while looking at Vaucoux :

“ My poor friend ! ” thought he. “ It is in thee that the enemy is.” . . .

He closed his eyes. . . . Centuries passed.



C L E R A M B A U L T

There are no more enemies. . . .

Clerambault tasted the peace of the worlds to come.